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Racial Motivations for French Collaboration during the Second World War: Uncovering the Memory through Film and Memoirs

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RACIAL MOTIVATIONS FOR FRENCH COLLABORATION
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR: UNCOVERING THE MEMORY
THROUGH FILM AND MEMOIRS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
History

by
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Abstract

After France was defeated by the Germans in June 1940, several politicians of the Third Republic formed a new government under Marshal Philippe Pétain in Vichy. The men in the new regime immediately began to make social and political changes which, in their mind, were long overdue. They believed that they could negotiate with the occupation officials in the North and maintain France's sovereignty, at least in the "free" Southern zone. They also believed, as did a large part of the French people, that the inadequacies of the republican system had lost France the war. It had certainly been unable to regenerate the nation after the First World War. The disillusionment with the ghastly losses of life in that war was widespread and only added to the problems of a postwar agricultural economy which the leaders of the Third Republic had been unwilling and unable to modernize.

In the 1920s, a generous immigration policy provided the country with desperately needed laborers, but by the early 1930s, the same time the effects of the Depression reached France, the French felt they were being "swamped" by immigrants and Jewish refugees. These were now seen as burdensome foreigners and subversive agitators, and were held responsible for the social and economic difficulties of that decade. The "enemy within" had weakened the nation. Many Frenchmen, including the politicians in the Vichy regime looked for a scapegoat and found it in the foreign and French Jews.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the nature of and motivation for French collaboration regarding the legal harassment, exclusion, and deportation of Jews. It

focuses on the way in which French traditional cultural anti-Semitism and xenophobia over time developed into racial prejudice. That transformation was re-enforced by the perceived and real economic desperation of the 1920s and 1930s.

Another main focus of this study is the way the memory of French contribution to the Holocaust was uncovered through films and memoirs. Particularly Marcel Ophüls penetrated French national consciousness with *The Sorrow and the Pity* in 1969. With this confrontational documentary, he was able to open the discussion about this dark chapter in French wartime history. After they realized that the French were beginning to face their past, numerous survivors came forward to tell their stories.

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Introduction

There were numerous political, economic, and cultural circumstances that provided fertile ground for French collaboration with the Nazi Regime during the Second World War. The unsuccessful navigation of politics by the officials of the Third Republic, many believed, was one of the major reasons for the French defeat in June 1940. The French looked for outside solutions and changes in government. The economy was poor and the influx of refugees in the second half of the 1930s, many of them Jewish, seemed to further burden France. A comparison of the staggering number of about 720,000 Italians living on French soil in 1936 with the estimated 300,000 Jews by 1940, which included the 55,000 Jewish refugees that came to France after 1933, already shows how perception was more powerful than facts.¹ The French belief that they were becoming swamped by Jews resembled the German fears and prejudices that fueled the Nazis' anti-Semitism. The French economy and culture were perceived as "at risk" of being overwhelmed: the economy by the Jewish refugees and French culture by "foreign elements" and modernist movements which Jews were associated with at the time.

The dissatisfaction of many Frenchmen made many look for a scapegoat and find it in the Jews, particularly in the foreign Jews who had recently emigrated from Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe. Anti-Semitism in France of course, had a long "tradition," but previously it was mainly culturally and religiously motivated, although not entirely without traces of racism. Certainly, France had a racial anti-Semitism which found access

¹ Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 103; Michael M. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp. 34-35.

to the Vichy regime, or *L'État Français* (the French State) that had been quickly formed by former Third Republic politicians and officials in the spa town of Vichy in southern France in 1940. Many French would help Vichy to rid France of Jews in various ways; this fact would become the collaborators' most lied about issue already at Liberation in 1944.

Although many knew the consequences and the fate that awaited the Jews in Eastern Europe after deportations from Drancy or other French concentration camps, they continued to collaborate, making the justifications for their collaboration racial ones, contrary to the belief that actions against Jews had only been culturally or economically motivated. France's denial of this part of its past is so strong because it is the darkest side of its history of the Second World War, therefore earning the Vichy period the name *les années noires* (the dark years). There were some differences between the actions of collaborators in the occupied North and the unoccupied South, but anti-Jewish actions were the ones most similar. The North was directly administered by the Nazis, and therefore any cooperation with anti-Jewish measures was forced on the French population; at least, the French could claim that later. But in the unoccupied "free" zone in the South, with Vichy as its capital, anti-Jewish decree laws, the *Statuts des Juifs*, had been implemented by the French themselves without any initial pressure from the Germans.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the nature of and motivation for French collaboration regarding the exclusion, legal harassment, roundups and deportation of Jews. Particularly interesting is the way in which French cultural anti-Semitism,

xenophobia, and ‘obsession’ with centralized cultural assimilation over time developed into racial prejudice, re-enforced by the perceived and real economic desperation of the 1930s. Although it is clear that French traditional anti-Semitism was always tied to ideas of nationhood, cultural anxieties, and social tensions due to financial and political problems, the tough economic circumstances of the interwar years in France, as well as the military defeat and occupation in 1940 transformed French anti-Semitism into racially motivated measures against Jews in particular.

This examination will therefore begin with an overview of the economy and politics in France, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s, and how the French perceived the impact of the large influx of immigrants during the interwar years on the economy, and to some extent on French society and culture. The immigrant situation is important, because the 1930s again saw a large immigration wave of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe due to discriminatory regulations there. The impoverished Eastern European Jews were certainly different from the already established French Jews. Although Vichy officials would claim that they “saved” French Jews and only persecuted foreign ones, French citizens of Jewish background or French-born children of Jewish immigrants also perished in Eastern European death camps.

The sources on collaboration dealing with this part of French history are numerous and the interest in clarifying the events of that period has been increasing constantly since the late 1960s. At first, however, the new republican government declared Vichy an “aberration” in French history in favor of national reconciliation and created an official post-war view of France’s role in the Second World War. This was the

“Gaullist myth of Resistance,” that is, that most of France had been in the Resistance movement or somehow attached to it and that there were only a few criminals and social misfits who were guilty of collaboration. Little research as a result was done on the French collaboration issue until the late 1960s. The issue had been a painfully disturbing memory; the French were ashamed because their collaboration came into context with the Nazi Regime and their atrocities in Eastern Europe. There were a few interviews, for example with Xavier Vallat, head of the *Commissariat Général des Question Juives* (Commissariat-General for Jewish Questions, CGQJ) that raised the issue but those interviewing and those being interviewed usually quickly switched to the veterans’ movement or the Resistance rather than examine Jewish affairs.² Interviews with these individuals therefore only resulted in a particular version of events being told, as the individual would have liked it to be, leaving out the embarrassing facts: “In any event, each participant’s version has been so often retold and re-defended since 1945, that it long ago lost all its spontaneity.”³ Generally, from the 1940s to the mid 1960s, the focus was on the German occupation centered on Paris, the northern part of the country, and the Atlantic sea shore, as well as the Resistance.⁴

With the exception of the French lawyer and historian Serge Klarsfeld, the first historians and other academics who dealt with Vichy’s past were foreigners, particularly the German Eberhard Jäckel, the American Robert O. Paxton, and the Canadian Michael M. Marrus, and their work came mainly in the latter half of the 1960s, and in the 1970s

²Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, xv.

³*Ibid.*, xvi.

⁴Richard J. Golsan, *Vichy’s Afterlife: History and Counterhistory in Postwar France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 10.

and 1980s. The first French academic colloquia focusing on that period did not deal with persecution of Jews and the Final Solution in France, as for example “Le Gouvernement de Vichy: 1940-1942” in 1970. It was not until 1992, with the appearance of “Présence du Passé, Lenteur de l’Histoire” that French academics began to discuss France’s complicity in the Final Solution.⁵

Groundbreaking work was done by Robert O. Paxton whose *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* appeared in 1972. At that time, Paxton already realized that Vichy’s “cultural and national xenophobia” gave reason to implement anti-Jewish laws that, for example, banned Jews from civil service and other middle-and-upper class professions, and therefore led to the exclusion of Jews from French society. Yet, it was in his later work, which he wrote with Michael M. Marrus, *Vichy France and the Jews* (1983), that Paxton altered his previous position and concluded that French anti-Semitism, particularly as part of Vichy’s conservative *Revolution Nationale* (National Revolution), represented a French contribution to the Holocaust. Vichy, Paxton and Marrus noted, created its own “home-grown” programs that partly exceeded what Germany imposed in the occupied North.⁶ An extension of that argument is at the center of this essay: French anti-Semitism, particularly during the social and economic difficulties of the occupation years, allowed for racial motives for collaboration with the Germans, resulting in mass deportation to certain death. Jews could have been protected better since many of them were French citizens, but Vichy was itself eager to reevaluate

⁵ Kim Munholland, “Review: Wartime France: Remembering Vichy,” *French Historical Studies* 18 (Spring 1994): 801.

⁶Marrus and Paxton, xxi.

laws and grants of citizenship some of which had their origin in the late 1920s to ease immigration of foreign laborers and their assimilation. Based on the new laws, Vichy could remove Jews and their alleged control of French economy from society by designating them as “foreign elements.”⁷ Affected by these laws, or at least by the legal harassment of bureaucrats were, to some smaller degree, Jewish veterans who had distinguished themselves by their service to France, established Jews of high society, and certain other layers of Jewish integrated society.

Serge Klarsfeld is another important scholar of the subject, a lawyer by education who became a true “Nazi hunter” who forced the French to examine the topic. A child survivor who lost his Romanian-Jewish father to deportation, he gathered detailed information on the role of the French in the Holocaust in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and he continues his efforts, with his non-Jewish German wife, Beate. His collections, *Memorial to the Jews deported from France 1942-1944: Documentation of the Deportation of the Victims of the Final Solution in France* (1983) and *French Children of the Holocaust: A Memorial* (1996), contain important information about the numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish citizens and foreign nationals who were victims of the deportations between 1942 and 1944. In *Vichy-Auschwitz: Die Zusammenarbeit der deutschen und französischen Behörden bei der „Endlösung der Judenfrage“ in Frankreich* (1989) Klarsfeld concentrates on several important civil servants who showed zeal and the utmost efficiency in the mass deportations. In *Memorial to the Jews*, the numerous lists of deportees provide name, birth place, and nationality, and as they are

⁷ Joel Blatt, “Relatives and Rivals: The Responses of the Action Française to Italian Fascism, 1919-26,” *European Studies Review* 11 (1981): 265-66.

arranged in chronological order, one can see that the birthplace of the deportees was increasingly Jews born on French soil, and that the lists increasingly contain the names of many women and children. Klarsfeld's collections provide dozens of incriminating documents, but also cite some letters that give proof of the humanity and sense of decency displayed by other Frenchmen who helped to hide Jews or who organized their escape to safety. In fact, there were several French and foreign non-Jewish and Jewish relief organizations, such as the Red Cross, the Society of Friends, the American Joint Distribution Committee(AJDC), or the Organisation de Secours aux Enfants (OSE) whose efforts in this regard remain legendary.

The real and perceived economic difficulties in the 1930s also led to the rejuvenation of anti-Semitic organizations in France. The majority of these had idealistic objectives that centered on the sentiments of nationalism and economic paranoia. The control of the French economy, they believed, needed to be returned into French hands and therefore members of these groups believed that they must save France from the "international Jew" or an international Jewish conspiracy, or a Judeo-Bolshevik threat. In addition, the national unity had to be re-established and therefore all enemies who did not politically conform had to be eradicated. These included "subversive elements" and "undesirable" individuals. Although France initially concentrated on communists and "Spanish Reds," and foreigners in general, the discriminatory measures that the last government of the Third Republic and then Vichy took were increasingly aimed at foreign Jews, and later those with French citizenship . In this context, it is essential to consider French xenophobia. It seems that some authors have seen the abuse of Jews as a

result of the latter. But rather than being directed towards all “foreign elements,” French violence and prejudice during the war in point-of-fact were directed almost exclusively against Jews and not the other immigrant groups which, as mentioned above, were more numerous.

Furthermore, the nationalistic fervor and desire for national unity and renewal that many French politicians and political groups promoted would later correspond to that of the National Revolution whose motto, “travail, famille, patrie” (work, family, fatherland) was very much –although maybe not fully consciously – a restatement of the objectives of France’s radical anti-Semitic organizations and propaganda. The invasion of France, the humiliating defeat of 1940, and the collapse of republican political institutions moved the aims of these groups very close to the goals of the Vichy regime. Or, in other words, as Robert Paxton has argued, collaboration gave an opportunity to these groups and Vichy to make internal social changes and political reforms.

The second part of this work will include the use of several memoirs to show the effect that racially motivated collaboration had on the Jews in France. Particularly helpful is Isaac Levendel’s *Not the Germans Alone: A Son’s Search for the Truth of Vichy* (1999), an account by a French Jew who had been a child during the occupation years and whose mother was deported. As an adult he returned to France to research the events that led up to his mother’s arrest and “disappearance.” He found that many of the individuals involved had been French police and administrative officials and that many of them had remained in place after liberation. The same was true when Gilbert Michlin, whose *Of No Interest to the Nation: A Jewish Family in France, 1925-1945. A Memoir*

(2004) will also be at the center of this study, returned to France after surviving Auschwitz.

Georgette Elgey's *The Open Window* (1974) recounts her memories of occupation from the perspective of a member of upper-class French Jews. Her story is insightful because it shows that not even well-established Jews from a long line of French citizens were able to avoid persecution. Her memoir centers on Georgette's grandmother who arranged an escape to the unoccupied zone, but whose status as a French citizen did not prevent her from a degrading and abusive interrogation while crossing the border.

The third portion will deal with the trials of war criminals and how France began dealing with its past beginning in the 1970s. The concluding chapters focus on the convictions and trials of war criminals in France, namely of René Bousquet, Maurice Papon, Paul Touvier, Jean Leguay, and Klaus Barbie and include a discussion of President François Mitterrand's own Vichy past. The passionate controversies that arose during the investigations and that ensued after these trials in the press and among intellectuals, but also among the public generally, particularly in the 1980s and in the 1990s, indicate how the French are finally dealing with the memory of these "dark years."

Except for foreign scholars, the subject was most thoroughly broached, not by historians, citizens, or politicians, but by French filmmakers. Their work has helped to uncover the painful memory of the war years. Marcel Ophüls's documentary film *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (The Sorrow and the Pity) in 1969, which was originally made for French television but blocked by the government for ten years, stirred up controversy

about and interest in French collaboration and the persecution of Jews and triggered more research in archives, – these archives, however, were only hesitantly opened for historians.⁸ Other films followed in the 1970s and 1980s, among them Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* (1974) and *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987), the latter based on Malle's own childhood.⁹

At least until the riots of 1968, the nation still believed strongly in the Resistance myth. But the claim that the vast majority of the French had played a part in the resistance movement all along, was, according to director Jacques Audiard in the comments he made regarding his more recent film *Un héros très discret* (A Self-Made Hero, 1996) on the subject, the biggest lie of that generation.¹⁰ Although the work of directors Louis Malle and others have been seen by some as part of a “media hype,” *The Sorrow and the Pity* successfully penetrated French national consciousness in 1970. Composed as it was of interviews with French, British, and German citizens who were in different ways involved in French affairs and politics prior to and during the occupation years, the film showed the extent to which people had only a limited vision of events and how many attempted to ignore the reality of France's defeat, of its defeated government and quick submission to the Nazis, and of occupation itself.

⁸ Although banned from television, a few interested crowds went to see the documentary at small local cinemas. See Phillip French, ed., *Malle on Malle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 91. Isaac Levendel, *Not the Germans Alone: A Son's Search for the Truth of Vichy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. x.

⁹ Bertram Gordon, *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980), p. 362. French, 89 and 92.

¹⁰ Audiard's film is about a young man who decides to “join the Resistance” without ever having participated in the war; quoted in Kathryn M. Lauten, ““Dusting Off” Dehousse: *Un héros très discret* (Audiard, 1996),” in Phil Powrie, ed. *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 58.

Robert Paxton's work has been essential when examining this topic as a whole. His groundbreaking work about Vichy policies and French collaboration is well-known for its attention to detail and, although initially very reluctantly, has been accepted even by French historians as an integral part of the historiography of this topic. *Vichy France* and *Vichy France and the Jews* endeavored to provide what, in Paxton's words, was a "new framework of interpretation" and relied heavily on documents from German and French archives. From the examination of these sources, he realized that Vichy had cooperated with the Nazis regarding the Final Solution more closely than most Frenchmen wanted to admit.

Paxton's well-researched work, especially Ophuls's documentary, the memoirs as well as the German and French documents collected by Klarsfeld reveal that Vichy's purportedly "autonomous" regime did neither save enough Jews, or protect French Jews, as many tried to claim after Liberation, and that French collaboration could not have been as thorough-going without the administrative eagerness and efficiency of the Vichy regime and the French police.

1) The French Economy, Immigration, and Politics in the 1920s and 1930s

Degeneration and the eternally low birth rate

Most historians agree that the economic and political difficulties of the interwar years caused France's quick defeat in June 1940 and subsequent instantaneous submission to its Nazi occupants, while Vichy only continued the policies of the Third Republic to address the "decadence" and financial misery that had befallen the nation; however, with seemingly new methods.¹¹ The devastations of the First World War had caused bitterness and exhaustion with the French people as well as with politicians from both Left and Right.¹² The economy remained stagnant and old-fashioned. The attitude of French politicians toward the economy, which still retained its emphasis on agriculture, small business, quality workmanship over mass production, and with restricted access by foreign businesses,¹³ was timid and cautious and eventually caused the economy to decline. The Depression did not reach France until 1932, which caused the French to believe that they were saved from the effects of the Depression that other countries had suffered early on. This only reinforced the politicians' beliefs that their policies and attitude were adequate.

Yet, there were many other sources of malaise. In addition to France's already historically modest birthrate sinking even lower, there were about 740,000 Frenchmen maimed for life and unable to work. Between 1900 and 1939 the French population grew

¹¹ Weber, 7.

¹² Ibid., 18.

¹³ Nathanael Greene, *From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic, 1919-1940* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1970), pp. 50-51.

only by about 3%, compared during the same time period to the German 36% or British 23%.¹⁴ While one consequence of this would be the problem of a lack of conscripts of adequate age in the late 1930s, the other even more significant effect was that France did not have enough labor to improve the economy and solve the financial crisis. After the war, in order to maintain “social peace” and avoid the spread of communism, to support disabled veterans, widows, and orphans, and to curb unemployment, France had to spend heavily on social services.¹⁵ With 428 million francs in war debt by 1923 and further heavy borrowing for post-war reconstruction, France pushed Germany to pay reparations that France also needed to make her own payments to Great Britain and the United States.¹⁶ In July 1926 the franc collapsed at 240 to the pound, compared to 130 to the pound from the previous year. In addition, parliamentary politicians finally in 1936, reluctantly deflated the franc.¹⁷

While the financial situation would improve relatively fast after devaluation, thanks in part to confidence in President Raymond Poincaré, the economic difficulties of the Depression era, especially from 1932 onwards, worsened the situation. These problems would only be resolved shortly before the beginning of the next world war, by which time it was too late for France to take any significant military advantage from the improvement in the economy and increase in war production, leaving the nation relatively unprepared for battle in 1940. One significant part of the economic difficulties of the 1930s, which would have a greater influence on collaboration policies, was the

¹⁴ Weber, 13.

¹⁵ Julian Jackson, ed., *Europe, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 58.

¹⁶ Jackson, *Europe*, 58.

¹⁷ Julian Jackson, *Politics of Depression in France defending Democracy, 1932-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 9 and 1.

second wave of immigrants, especially between 1933 and 1939. This time refugees came from Germany, Austria, and Poland.

The French birthrate was already higher because of immigration, but, in addition, France had to significantly loosen immigration policies. In the post-war decade, France recruited foreign labor for steel firms, coal mines, and mechanized farms, while also trying to fulfill military recruitment.¹⁸ Although most immigrant laborers were Polish miners, settling in the North and Northeast, and Italian agricultural workers, France opened its doors to laborers from all over Europe. About two million immigrants arrived in France in that decade. Although many were Catholics, the immigrants were seen as less “assimilable,” since the majority, about four fifths, consisted of men who were either single or who had left their families at home. In addition, these immigrants were restricted to work in manual labor and other undesirable positions in largely isolated mining towns or farms. Only one in four was naturalized.¹⁹

However, they were at least not seen as a threat to urban workers and the middle-class. Most immigrants stayed in France only temporarily and wanted to return home, many to the families they had left behind and with money they had earned after a few years.²⁰ Most Italians and Poles began to leave the country in the early 1930s. After 1932, when the French economy turned sour because of the first signs of the Depression becoming visible, these laborers were encouraged to leave, and eventually fired and forced to leave, since as a result of rising unemployment, both the government and

¹⁸ Vicki Caron, “Anti-Semitic Revival in France in the 1930s: The Socioeconomic Dimension Reconsidered,” *Journal of Modern History* 70 (March 1998): 53.

¹⁹ Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995), p. 348. Caron, 53-54.

²⁰ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 34-35.

French workers as well as professionals desired an overall reduction of the foreign work force. In 1930, 43,000 foreign workers left France, 93, 000 in 1931, and 108, 000 in 1932, and in the five years after 1931, half a million had left.²¹

In the second half of the 1930s, there was another influx of refugees that many saw as a burden. As indicated, by the early 1930s more foreign workers were returning to their home countries than entering. But the new immigrants were refugees affected by the turbulence of Eastern European and German politics, and by the end of 1938, France was receiving more refugees than any other country in Europe, becoming “the premier nation of asylum in the world.”²² Estimates indicate that there were about 180,000 refugees, excluding those who had become citizens or re-emigrated.²³

Germany’s racial and extreme right-wing politics and measures against Jews greatly increased the number of Jewish immigrants into France. Many of these Jewish refugees either became citizens of France or moved on to the United States, England, and Palestine, while it was still possible. Then there were also immigrants who were not Jewish, but who came into France for the same reasons. For example, in 1936, about 720,000 Italians were still living on French soil; this is a staggering number compared to the estimated 300,000 Jews in France in 1940, including the 55,000 Jews who had come to France in the decade after 1933.²⁴

²¹ Weber, 90-92.

²² Caron, 30.

²³ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 34-35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Overall, about 60,000 refugees left Germany by December 1933, of which about 86% or 51,065 were Jews; about 25,000 of these went to France.²⁵ These numbers are significant because of the belief of the French that they were becoming “swamped” by Jews. This perception resembled the fears and prejudices in Germany that fueled the Nazis’ anti-Semitism. The French economy and the culture were, as it was said, “at risk” of being overwhelmed.²⁶

Hostility toward Jews was deepened because Jewish emancipation was directly connected to a new social, political, and economic order of the French Republic. As a result of their emancipation, Jews had found ways to succeed in the economy throughout the 19th century – in France and Germany - which in turn made them seem a major threat to French citizens’ employment opportunities and the economy in general.²⁷ More concretely, Jews in France of the 1930s, because they were the only group of immigrants concentrated in the professions became a main target for the French of the low middle-class and middle-class, and anti-Semitic sentiments and discrimination grew. This was seen among industrialists, merchants, artisans, small shop keepers, and the liberal professions, particularly lawyers and doctors who wanted to minimize their foreign competition.²⁸ Many claimed that Jewish immigrants, particularly German Jews, were the biggest offenders against French labor laws, as well as guilty of breaching health

²⁵In his article “60,000 Have Fled From Nazis’ Reich” in the *New York Times* from December 6, 1933, Clarence K. Streit estimated that about 6,500 went to Palestine, 6,000 to Poland, 5,000 to Czechoslovakia and Hungary each, 3,000 to England, 2,500 to Switzerland and Belgium each, 1,500 to Scandinavia, and 800 to Austria; the remaining 1,500 dispersed into numerous countries, including the United States. See also Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 129.

²⁶Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 36.

²⁷Caron, 28.

²⁸Caron, 27; *New York Times*, December 6, 1933.

regulations. Many described them as swindlers. The perception of the medical association was distorted; only three percent of practicing doctors were foreigners in 1930, though it was eleven percent in Paris. Yet, the threat seemed real enough to put restrictions even on foreign medical students.²⁹ After the *Anschluss*, the number of refugees increased from Austria, and as a result, the French government took additional legal measures to keep Austrian Jews out of France.³⁰

The French government had already implemented strong restrictionist laws as early as August 1932 when it limited the number of immigrants in certain professions, and in July 1934 when naturalized foreigners henceforth had to wait ten years before they were able to hold public office and before being accepted to the bar. Another major restrictionist measure was the revision of the naturalization law of 1927 that had decreased the residency requirement from ten to three years. Eventually a decree from November 1938 eased the denaturalization of citizens and their French-born children.³¹ In the same month, the Daladier government passed the most discriminatory decree law yet which allowed the establishment of special camps for the internment of “undesirables.” The first of these facilities was established at Rieucros in the Lozère in February 1939. The main internees were initially “Spanish reds” who had come in a wave at the end of the Spanish Civil War. They were seen as potentially subversive and were believed to be warmongers.³²

²⁹ Caron, 41-42; Weber, 90-92.

³⁰ Caron, 39-40.

³¹ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 105.

³² Ibid.

However, soon, undesirables included Jewish refugees, who were also believed to be warmongers, and more camps opened, particularly in Southwestern France, including Gurs, Argelès, Saint-Cyprien, and Le Vernet. Not only would Vichy find many internment camps already existing, it also took over the system of foreigner surveillance by the French police. André Tulard of the Paris police prefecture was to later perfect his screening methods begun in the 1930s and create Vichy's register of both French and foreign Jews.³³

While the middle-class was the least affected by the Depression, their professional associations were the strongest supporters of a more restrictive immigration and naturalization policy.³⁴ By contrast, those affected the most by hard times, the *classes moyennes*, peasants and small businessmen, many of them unemployed, and who, according to Julian Jackson had a great deal of political importance, seem to have been considered less by the government during the issuance of decree laws than the upper middle class.³⁵ Catering to the cultural anxieties of the latter, rather than curbing actual unemployment, the decree laws were in reality an expression of anti-Semitic sentiments and later evolved into radical discriminatory measures against Jews in France.

While this "layer" of French society not only perceived the recent newcomers as an economic threat, they were also those faced with unwanted as well as threatening changes to the economy in general and industry in particular. In common with the politicians, Frenchmen looked upon the influences from the United States in production

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Caron, 41 and 53; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 104.

³⁵ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 11.

and management techniques inspired by Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford with great suspicion.³⁶ Having little formal education in economics, the politicians chose to “improvise” with patchwork decrees or simply to ignore problems.³⁷

The government felt it was its duty to increase national labor as well as capital by encouraging French financiers to invest at home and not abroad,³⁸ while restricting the flow of international capital into France which appeared to be undermining the economy. This national effort by the government and the central banks was in stark contrast to bankers and speculators whose actions were seen as traitorous since they were foiling the rehabilitation of the economy. To many the Jews involved in the world of banking and finance stood out as saboteurs of France’s efforts, while speculators and investors in general were often deemed foreign, “alien”. A significant factor in this sense of treachery was the preponderance of American economic ideas to Europe after the First World War.³⁹

The Depression and the clumsy manner in which the Third Republic’s parliamentary politicians responded to economic problems undermined political stability and the people’s faith in democratic government. Between 1932 and 1936, six of eleven governments fell over economic and financial issues.⁴⁰ Political instability led to an incoherent foreign policy, seen in the fact that France was not able to intervene when Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland in 1936. This only reinforced the continued trend

³⁶ Jackson, *Europe*, 55; *Politics of Depression*, 12.

³⁷ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 12. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the Nazi Threat: The Collapse of French Diplomacy, 1932-1939* (New York: Enigma Books, 2004), p. xxxii.

³⁸ Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1995), p. 368.

³⁹ Jackson, *Europe*, 72-76.

⁴⁰ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 3.

toward appeasement. In 1936 a Socialist government took office under a French Jew, Léon Blum, with the Popular Front, a combination of Socialists, Radicals, and Moderates. Although Communists supported the Popular Front, they did not participate in the government. Blum's government, like previous governments, encountered a crisis within the Treasury. However, the situation improved by 1938, industrial production increased by 20%, reaching the level of 1928; commercial deficit dropped by 26%, and unemployment fell by 10%.⁴¹ Much of the improvement was due to arms spending and production, but also due to the "import" of foreign labor.⁴²

When the Depression began to affect France, later than in most European countries and the United States, it lasted longer. Eugen Weber described it as "nagging drizzle" or slow rot compared to the blizzard-like effects in Great Britain and Germany. If between 1925 and 1929 the general industrial production index was 100, in 1930 it was at 97 in Germany, 88 in the United States, 115 in France; in 1931, it was 74 in Germany, 74 in the United States, and 102 in France. In 1932, France began to suffer when other industrial countries were at the bottom and it did not really recover until late 1938. Meanwhile recession and depression were widely attributed to over-equipment and over-production, the "Mechanization" of French industry: there were too many machines replacing workers and the large amount of mass-produced goods could not find an outlet.⁴³

⁴¹ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 203-211.

⁴² Weber, 90-91.

⁴³ Weber, 33-35; Jackson, *Europe*, 55.

This combination of impact of the Depression and lingering post-war economic difficulties added to France's political problems, especially given the fragmented nature of its party system.⁴⁴ The incoherent, even unstable, nature of parliamentary politics with its multiple parties was partly the reason why between 1932 and 1936 France could simply not react to hard times by cutting government expenditure or by pursuing a policy of deflation because of opposition from the many parties.⁴⁵ It was not until 1936, that a Socialist government, led by a Jew, was at last in the position to begin economic recovery. Blum was relatively successful in applying some social reforms, such as the forty-hour week and resolving the government's financial problems, although these actions came a little too late. Regarding foreign policy, Blum wanted peace. He was a captive of the Socialists' pacifistic policies and when events outside of France – in Germany, Central Europe, and Spain – became increasingly menacing, his foreign policy floundered. This was not entirely the fault of Blum or the Popular Front, but also a reflection of France's deep-seated political problems, in general, and fear of war, in particular.⁴⁶

By 1938, it seemed likely that Europe was steering toward another war, exactly what France dreaded and sought to avoid. The policy of various governments had been, “anything but war” and pacifism was wide-spread throughout society and certainly among intellectuals. The strength of this current was seen in the flood of war memoirs and novels with their bitter memories of Verdun, government incompetence, ghastly

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 16. In general, there was less attachment to a party and more to a specific individual. Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 212.

⁴⁶ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 272.

losses of life, and useless sacrifices. Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*, published in 1916, sold 300,000 copies by 1918, and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published in 1929, sold 450,000 copies by that year's end. Both were examples of this strong anti-war sentiment prevalent in France and in the West after the war, as countries affected by the stalemated war had come to emphasize cooperation in this desire to never allow such a conflict again. This feeling was notably expressed in the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, a multilateral treaty that renounced war as a solution to international conflicts. Thus it is hardly surprising that in the 1930s the French and the British were pursuing a policy of appeasement toward Hitler.⁴⁷

Although the relationship between Great Britain and France, given their historical rivalry, was one of reluctant tolerance at best, France looked to Britain for guidance in its relation to Hitler. At the time, the British embraced appeasement. And for its part, though Great Britain certainly had the safety of Europe on its mind, it was not eager to get involved into another war on the continent. After the defeat, the politicians of the Third Republic and Vichy blamed the British for not having done enough to ensure strong international alliances and defend France. In their minds, Britain had let them down and been responsible for French defeat and occupation.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, Britain's appeasement policy attempt at a rapprochement between France and Germany obviously allowed Hitler to put his foot in the door, giving the Rhineland and later the Sudetenland and Austria. In the French government, with fear of

⁴⁷ Weber, 18.

⁴⁸ Wright, 370 and 371; in February 1941, Admiral François Darlan even offered French military collaboration in the colonies against British troops. Ibid., 387.

another war growing during the 1930s, the Left and Right increasingly accused each other of warmongering. Where as previously the Left had wanted peace at all costs and the Right war, sides now switched in their attitude towards war. This situation was certainly to the disadvantage of Blum who now considered a warmonger, being said that the Jews (especially those who had fled Hitler) wanted to “drag” France into another war with Germany. Only a short while ago it had been the Popular Front and the Left that had been attacked by the Right for pursuing a policy of constant accommodation with Germany since 1936.⁴⁹ Now positions reversed, while the refugees flooding across the borders fueled the xenophobic fears of the French people, prompting suspicion regarding the foreigners’ political leanings and claims that they wanted revenge against the Nazis.

The military had remained cautious, however. Germany was the eternal enemy and could not be trusted. But the French victory over the Germans in the last war gave military leaders a false confidence that the old strategies would work again if necessary. While France had one of the best armies in Europe in 1939, especially because of recent rearmament, its generals had an outdated notion of warfare. They concentrated on a defensive strategy, confident that their natural borders, such as the Ardennes, would force the Germans to turn around, or at least hold them up until the arrival of French troops. In addition, the strong currents of pacifism since the Great War had further inhibited thinking of aggressive strategies in a war with Germany. Modernization of the army, in fact, began only in late 1938 when the economy improved.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Wright, 376.

⁵⁰ Eberhard Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa. Die deutsche Frankreichpolitik im 2. Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), p. 14; Wright, 378-79.

Unfortunately, French intelligence reports tended to exaggerate numbers of available German forces and rearmament capabilities. The military misstated the numbers to get the attention from the government which in turn learned to ignore the intelligence assessments because politicians knew about the exaggerations. Moreover, many of these men still had a fresh memory of the last war; they hoped for peace and bet on appeasement. The events at Munich were thus seen as a victory over “warmongers,” though it was also Munich that caused France to focus on foreign policy and rearmament.⁵¹

French parliamentarians, though, had already in a way been caught unaware by Hitler’s reoccupation of the Rhineland. To make matters worse, there was not much diplomatic reaction to Hitler’s bold move. This was a further example of the Third Republic’s weakness as a parliamentary democracy seemingly incapable of establishing any form of stability, particularly in matters of foreign affairs. From a financial standpoint, France could not respond with military action, neither in 1936 nor in 1938, and hence “appeasement was all that France could afford.”⁵²

This left the French dispirited and anxious – there was the perception that the glory days of the French Empire were ending or were over, and that the time-honored parliamentary democracy was not functioning, or at least degenerating quickly. The nation was divided and seemed politically incompetent, more than ever before. These were turbulent and hatred-laden years, yet society was stalemated. French politicians,

⁵¹ Peter Jackson, “French Intelligence and Hitler’s Rise to Power,” *Historical Journal* 41 (September 1998): 823-24.

⁵² Jackson, *Politics of Depression*, 3.

especially under the Third Republic, had never welcomed change, even at the cost of stagnation. The Great War merely reinforced this resistance, and when in the interwar years “modernity” in the form of mass culture, modern art, and modern capitalism began to spread throughout France, the leadership as well as the general public clung to old-fashioned values which they perceived as a guarantee for continuity.⁵³

France’s political and social problems were enormous and tore the country apart from within. While the demographic stagnation and the memory of so many young men lost produced a fear of “degeneration,” the “surplus” population of immigrants caused a fear of “ethnic dilution” of the French “stock.” In addition, with the shift of the population to the urban centers, France’s farming population was shrinking. Hence the agricultural economy and the rural people and culture that had defined France for so long seemed to be disappearing.⁵⁴

The democratic traditions that had sustained France were seen as falling short, unable to guarantee national growth, safety, and economic stability and this at the moment that National Socialism and fascism appeared more vibrant, forceful, and successful.⁵⁵ This seemed to many another sign of national decline and that the country’s problems were not simply causing the decay from within, but also that the nation and empire were caving in under the pressure of political and military aspirations of more prosperous states.

⁵³ Greene, 134-135. Also Weber, *passim*.

⁵⁴ Jackson, *Europe*, 79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The energy emanating from the totalitarian movements certainly infected many Frenchmen with what might be called “action fever.” This was not just imitation of fascist ideas but a reaction to the initially pacifist and socialist government of Blum and a call for action and to make changes happen. Instead of acknowledging that Blum had inherited a majority of the country’s problems, the Popular Front was later often blamed for France’s defeat. Blum and the Popular Front were being accused of changing everything that France supposedly stood for, but also for being too attached to the Republic and its disease of incompetence, stagnation, and inaction. The Popular Front’s socialist and anti-conservative programs together with Pierre Laval’s deflationary politics from 1935, which Blum continued, triggered a radicalization of the right, promoting authoritarianism and a yearning for the traditional hierarchy from the good old days of peasants under the care of a strong leadership, including the Church, patrons and the military. Many of those who sympathized with the reactionary right, especially after 1936, would go on to support Vichy.⁵⁶

Just as the Blum government had been a reaction to the Depression, and street protests and violence of anti-parliamentarian riots by conservatives and far-right leagues on February 6, 1934,⁵⁷ the Right was transformed into a more radical movement in

⁵⁶ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 78.

⁵⁷ The riots were in reaction to the Stavisky scandal - one of the many of the 1920s - involving a Jewish speculator, Serge Alexandre Stavisky who had brought about the collapse of a French bank. His police record went back many years by 1933, but his files had been lost or “tucked away”. Although his case had been pending since 1928, it was postponed nineteen times. His prosecution included an eminent Freemason. In addition, Stavisky had contributed to Radical election funds and Radicals and journalists had intervened on his behalf. Many were certain that this was a conspiracy by parliamentarians, the judiciary, and the Jews. See Weber, 131-132.

response to the Popular Front.⁵⁸ While historians do not agree as to whether a unified, purely fascist or national socialist movement like in Germany or Italy in the 1920s and 1930s existed in France, the pressure of many radical splinter groups and currents promoting authoritarian and nationalistic, anti-republican, anti-socialist, and anti-Semitic ideas provided a fertile ground for the Vichy regime and for collaboration with the German occupation authorities in the North. Although most politicians and Frenchmen were strongly anti-German, fear of war and a “red coup” and of communism in general, led the French to put their anti-German sentiments aside and concentrate on defending France against reds and warmongers. This had its origin in the reaction to the socialist agenda of the Popular Front, and already in the second half of 1930s many Frenchmen believed that Hitler was better than Blum and another war.⁵⁹ Coincidentally, Pierre Laval was one of the biggest pacifists and supporters of this current of Franco-German reconciliation in French interwar political culture. He later became vice-premier under Vichy, in 1940, returning after his dismissal as prime minister in April 1942 and the most powerful man under Pétain.⁶⁰ He would never divert from his pro-German attitude during his years in Vichy.

While people expected the politicians to protect local interests, at the same time they felt that changes to strengthen the state or the budget were necessary and overdue. The fact that neighboring countries had more dynamic regimes reinforced this discontent.⁶¹ Many politicians in Paris as well as the public became obsessed with notions

⁵⁸ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 77.

⁵⁹ Weber, 107-108.

⁶⁰ Wright, 387.

⁶¹ Greene, 134.

of renewal, action and order, for as Nathaniel Greene writes, “[an] authoritarian alternative had a wide appeal among bewildered and frightened parliamentarians, some of whom, of course, were natural enthusiasts for a regime of authority and order.”⁶²

The Depression gave a further impetus for the rise of many “leagues” that were loosely termed fascist.⁶³ Already in the early 1930s, active extreme right-wing and fascist groups with their characteristic stronger organization, and ideas of action and renewal found resonance among the public.⁶⁴ While the 3 million membership estimate of the *Croix de Feu* by 1939 was definitely an exaggeration, this French-grown extreme right-wing group was indeed gaining plenty of new members. Between 1934 and 1939 it was the fastest growing and in 1936 counted about 600,000 members, more than that of the Socialists (c.200, 000) and Communists (c.284, 000) combined.⁶⁵ Another of these radical, anti-parliamentarian groups or “leagues” was the *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF) led by Jacques Doriot with half a million members as one of the largest.⁶⁶ The most robust and longest-lasting of these leagues was the *Action française* under Charles Maurras, which served as a kind of “apprenticeship” for its members who later moved on to various extremist politics.⁶⁷

Many historians, including René Remond, Eugen Weber, Ernst Nolte, Robert Soucy, and Zeev Sternhell have found it difficult to fathom the ideology and methods of

⁶² Ibid., 132.

⁶³ Wright, 356.

⁶⁴ Robert J. Soucy, “French Fascism and the *Croix de Feu*: A Dissenting Interpretation,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26 (January 1991): 163; Michael B. Loughlin, “Gustave Herve’s Transition from Socialism to National Socialism: Another Example of French Fascism?” *Journal of Contemporary History* 36 (January 2001): 18.

⁶⁵ Soucy, 160.

⁶⁶ Wright, 356.

⁶⁷ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 49-50.

these groups and their relationship to fascism elsewhere. Doctrinal references by *Croix de Feu*'s founder Colonel de la Rocque to "families of good stock," indicate close resemblance to Nazism. Yet, French fascist leaders refused to be associated with Hitler's party. De la Rocque condemned, for example, Hitler's Night of the Long Knives. Gordon Wright suggests that it was exactly the vagueness of the leagues' philosophy that made these groups so appealing. Regardless of the obscure nature of the movements' ideology, it was, on the one hand, the rejection of democracy, strong nationalism, and authoritarian conservatism that served as common denominator for these extreme right-wing groups; on the other, it was the desire to defeat the growing appeal of the left, and the power of the Popular Front.⁶⁸ Rather than yearning to turn the political world upside down and create a new order, the leagues were eager to restore unity and hierarchy in French society, now apparently dominated by middle-class capitalist, and the political body which seemed infested by small power groups that were too sensitive to voters' "mood swings" dependent on fluctuations of the economy. As Gordon Wright suggests, the leagues did not long for "upheaval and the creation of a new elite but for order, stability, authority, and a return to the old elites."⁶⁹

This desire for re-establishing the old hierarchy meant ridding France of its bourgeois and capitalist elements, including Jews who increasingly crystallized as a special group within French politics and culture, at a time when xenophobia was rampant and only further fueled anti-Semitic prejudices. Although some historians claim that

⁶⁸ Soucy, 174, 167 and 169; William D. Irvine, "French Conservatives and the "New Right" during the 1930s," *French Historical Studies* 8 (Autumn 1974): 561.

⁶⁹ Wright, 357.

anti-Semitism was rarely part of French fascism until the late 1930s and the creation of the Popular Front government under Blum⁷⁰, anti-Semitism nested firmly on both sides of the political spectrum throughout the interwar years. Jews were either despised by the Right because of their Socialist leanings, and presumed connections to Bolshevism, or they were feared by the Left, because of their connection to capitalism. Either way, Jews could not win. In fact in September 1938 there were anti-Jewish demonstrations in Paris and other French cities.⁷¹

Regardless of the time frame in which anti-Semitism was incorporated into the fascist ideology, the common denominators mentioned above were picked up by Marshal Pétain for establishing Vichy. The Vichy program for national reconstruction and social renewal under the National Revolution drew from solutions and committees that had been established in 1938 by decree as emergency response to the crises of the previous years. Some examples are the population committee, *Haut Comité de la Population*, and the Family Code, a pro-natalist crusade under which the government was handing out incentives to large families, loans to young couples, and suppressing pornography.⁷² Pétain even adopted the *Parti Social Français's* (PSF, which had grown out of Colonel de la Rocque's *Croix de Feu*) slogan "travail, famille, patrie" - as opposed to the

⁷⁰ Although the time frame is not really important in the context of Vichy's anti-Semitism; what is important is the fact that anti-Semitism existed in many shades of intensity within French political culture as well as society, and had already early on obtained its racist definitions. With other words, Vichy did not invent racial anti-Semitism but instead it had evolved under the right-wing groups within the five years from 1934 to 1939.

⁷¹ Pierre Birnbaum, "Anti-Semitism and Anti-Capitalism in Modern France," in *The Jews in Modern France*, ed., Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1985), pp. 216 and 218; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 104-107.

⁷² Jackson, *Dark Years*, 103-104.

democratic “liberté, égalité, fraternité,” - to encourage a more traditionalist policy.⁷³

Vichy embraced much of the strong restriction policies of the government under Daladier who was himself anti-Semitic and xenophobic and who also had governed largely with decree powers.⁷⁴ Vichy incorporated these policies into its own *Statuts des Juifs*.

In truth these were various reasons for frustration amongst the general population, while the government leaders could not stop their inter-parliamentary quarrels.

Frenchmen, including politicians, looked for ways to release their fears and disillusionment, their anxieties and frustration with the shortcomings of the republican regime. They found a scapegoat not just in refugees in general, but the Jews in particular.

⁷³ Wright, 385.

⁷⁴ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 102-104.

2) French anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, and “Obsession” with Cultural Assimilation

*“If the Jews did not exist, they would have to be invented.”*⁷⁵

The common dissatisfaction of Frenchmen with the economy and with republican government caused many to look for a scapegoat, and they found it in the Jews, particularly the foreign Jews who had recently immigrated from Germany, Austria, and Eastern Europe. The Eastern European Jews were different. Despite their desire to integrate, they adhered to their distinct religious and cultural traditions, often establishing and joining immigrant organizations that desired a more orthodox atmosphere. Collectively, these made Jews vulnerable to jealousy, harassment, and exclusion. Anti-Semitism had a long “tradition” in France, but previously it had been mainly - if not exclusively - culturally and religiously rather than racially motivated.

It is important to understand the roots of modern anti-Semitism in France in light of the fact that the nation had been the first to integrate Jews fully and to give them citizenship. French Jews were acculturized Jews in a way not comparable to other major European countries. However, it was in the late 19th century and in the “scientific community” that the Jews came to be seen as a separate group of people. According to Michael Marrus, it was then that a “vaguely racial definition” of being Jewish was imposed. The new definition was distinct from religious beliefs or cultural identification. This point-of-view was initially accepted by Jews and non-Jews alike.⁷⁶ Yet, at the same

⁷⁵ Pierre Birnbaum, *Anti-Semitism in France: A political history from Léon Blum to the present* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1992), p. 199.

⁷⁶ Michael R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: The French Jewish Community at the time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 3.

time it was France and the French Revolution that had emancipated the Jews, so they had also become a part of the French “national culture,” of the French spirit. But as Marrus points out, citizenship was not so much about individual freedom and equality, as it was of sharing a common experience of national inheritance, of being part of the “national patrimony.”⁷⁷ Once freedom was linked to citizenship, according to Marrus, it affected Jews in two ways: Jews were entitled to national culture, and, more importantly, their emancipation was automatically linked to assimilation. They had to become Frenchmen and were supposed to abstain from maintaining their Jewish cultural and religious ties.⁷⁸ Robert Paxton concurs that “Traditional conservative French xenophobia demanded cultural conformity [...] more insistently than physical appearance.”⁷⁹

Assimilation, in fact, became important to the Jews of France and had allowed for the creation and the growth of a well-established French Jewish bourgeoisie. The foreign Jews, who arrived during the 1920s and 1930s, however, could not engage in this assimilation and were therefore from the start excluded. The leading positions in the Central Consistory were held by French Jews of privileged class and together with many other middle- and upper-class French Jews they actually resented immigrant Jews. Although many wanted to help the newcomers during the 1930s, and then during the war when they were persecuted, there was also a large number of French Jews who sought to remain separate so as to not draw attention to themselves as being “foreign,” “different” or seen as disruptive elements. The historian Paula Hyman concludes that the French

⁷⁷ Marrus, *Politics of Assimilation*, 87.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 175.

Jewish community, from the end of the 19th century until the Second World War, came to be seen increasingly foreign because of the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe and they were now associated by race with their coreligionists.⁸⁰

Although for a short time the Third Republic generously naturalized many immigrants, with the result that by 1936, 70% of those who had immigrated after 1927 had become French citizens, the government passed decree laws at the end of the 1930s, at the height of economic stagnation and pre-war hysteria, which closed the doors to most immigrants and removed some of the privileges of those recently naturalized, and in the end revoked the citizenship of many immigrants. In any case, naturalization became more difficult. For example, the new decrees required of those naturalized after 1936 that they serve longer in the military or live in France for ten years (it had previously specified three years) before being admitted to the bar or allowed to enter the civil service.⁸¹

It was the middle-class in general that wanted some restrictions on the access of refugees to France. Those in the liberal professions, such as teaching, medicine and law, as well as students of medicine and law resented foreign students and professionals from Eastern Europe, fearing they would become “unfair” competition for jobs that already seemed scarce. The medical association claimed that foreign doctors, many of whom were Jewish, would undermine the quality of the profession in France, even though ironically there was a shortage of well-trained doctors at the time in rural areas.⁸²

⁸⁰ Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 1.

⁸¹ Caron, 41.

⁸² Caron, 45.

The date that Hyman sets as the beginning of this shift in attitude regarding Jews is the end of the 19th century and specifically the Dreyfus Affair. According to Jean-Denis Bredin, but this is also confirmed by other historians, “the Affair” opened anti-Semitism to the anti-republican movements as “an arena for propaganda” and thus the event linked anti-Semitism with a reactionary ideology.⁸³ Men of the extreme Right and Left, as well as professional anti-Semites, like Édouard Drumont, realized the potential of anti-Semitism to “whip up crowds” and of its use for anti-issue politics in general.⁸⁴ Conservative movements such as the Boulangists of the 1880s and Charles Maurras’s reactionary nationalist *Action française* desired a reversal of liberalizing phenomena, such as democracy, republicanism, socialism, and internationalism, as these “currents” they believed were opposed to the conservative authoritarianism of the “good old France.” Since Jewish assimilation was a part of this liberalizing trend, anti-Semites desired the reversal of Jewish emancipation.⁸⁵

Early popular anti-Semitism was publicized by authors like Édouard Drumont, Charles Maurras, and Maurice Barrès. But beginning in the 1880s, anti-Semitism became especially rampant in the press, with *Candide*, *Gringoire*, and *Je Suis Partout* as the most prominent, and pamphlets triggered by the Panama Canal Company affair. The company’s financial trouble had in some ways been related to Jewish speculators. The scandal eventually led to the collapse of a Catholic bank in France. And to make matters worse, the government had taken bribes not to tell the public. Especially Drumont was

⁸³ Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), pp. 521-22 and 530.

⁸⁴ Herbert A. Strauss, *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Antisemitism, 1870-1933/1939* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), p. 455.

⁸⁵ Strauss, 455.

able to exploit the affair for his anti-Semitic tirades.⁸⁶ In 1886, Drumont, also the owner of the daily newspaper *La Libre Parole*, which circulated between 1892 and 1944, had written *La France Juive*, a combination of Christian anti-Judaism and critique by the Left of Jewish plutocrats. In his writing he blamed the Jews for French decadence and claimed that Jews had conquered France and needed to be removed from the Aryan French society. Their French citizenship should certainly be revoked.⁸⁷

In general, the papers were to “mobilize and integrate.”⁸⁸ Some of these were Socialist-leaning, some conservative and Catholic. Jews were identified as responsible for their problems and slowly the theory of the Jewish plot developed.⁸⁹ Thus already by the end of the 19th century, the mutually nourishing sentiments of anti-Semitism and anti-capitalism had been engrained in French society. In this way, the anti-capitalism anti-Semitism of the socialists overlapped with the view of the reactionary nationalist Right, both contending that Jews were anti-French because they were “*les gros*” (“bigwigs”), international financiers who took money out of the country, using the French economy to built connections to the global market and their foreign friends and causing the disintegration of France. This theme of Jewish responsibility for the economic insecurity of hard-working Frenchmen appeared as early as 1898 and became a part of the nostalgia for the golden age of agrarian France, a time when all social classes lived in harmony.⁹⁰ Further, the far Left and the far Right supported the view of the Catholic daily *La Croix*

⁸⁶ Strauss, 456; Wright, 358; Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), p. 57.

⁸⁷ Ralph Schor, *L'Antisémitisme en France pendant les années trente: Prélude à Vichy* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1992), p. 9-10.

⁸⁸ Strauss, 470.

⁸⁹ And even the theme of ritual murder reappeared. See Strauss, 470-471.

⁹⁰ Schor, 10.

that Jews were exploiters of ordinary French folks, growing fat on the ‘blood of humble Frenchmen’ and not a part of French society at all.⁹¹ Eventually, the economic anti-Semitism of the 19th century adopted the idea of the Jew as an entirely foreign element in French society and culture.

The focus of 19th century anti-Semites on economic issues did not mean that early anti-Semitism was not racially motivated, for Jews in particular, not capitalists in general, were held responsible for the workers’ plight and economic conditions. In the minds of early anti-Semitic socialists, it was the Jews, who time and again, had forced French companies into bankruptcy, in the name of Rothschild or the ‘two hundred families,” who, they said, were always hiding behind the “wall of money.” To discriminate against the Jews thus meant to “shake up the masses,” and became an intrinsic part of the anti-Semites’ campaign to overcome social differences and injustice.⁹² Anti-Semitism therefore became an integrating force because the Left and Right perceived a common enemy. As a result the idea of the Jew as foreign element took hold in the mind of the political elite as well as the public. Furthermore, anti-Semitism evolved from a theme in theoretical writings into an “instinctive physical” problem, as Drumont termed it.⁹³ According to the members of the *Action française* the Jew could not escape his “nature” and would always retain his Jewish identity. Vandalisations of stores, looting, and assaults against Jews occurred in the riots that took place between January and February 1898 that anti-Semitic groups like the *Action française* claimed

⁹¹ Birnbaum, *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Capitalism*, 216 and 218; Schor, *ibid.*

⁹² Soucy, 471.

⁹³ Strauss, 472-74.

were ‘in response’ to the arrest of French-Jewish Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus. In the view of anti-Semites this man had to be guilty; for he was a Jew. “His ethnic nose,” his “hard and defiant” face, “his foreign physiognomy,” were proof of his crime.⁹⁴ “The Affair” would really trigger a fertile period for anti-Semitic politics, as it was for “radical” politics of both the Left and the Right.

Anti-Semitism at this point in time was not necessarily as purely racist as it was among the early Nazis with their ideas of biological determinism. Eugen Weber, in fact, has claimed that anti-Semitism in France for the longest time remained rather a literary movement, excessive in the press and a philosophical question which could be discussed in writings but which had no real substance for use in political ideologies. Yet Weber himself and other historians have noted the violent physical attacks against Jews between the 1890s and 1930s in France. Zeev Sternhell has observed how anti-Semitism belonged to many “strands” of all periods: reactionary Catholicism, the French Left’s anti-capitalism, romantic nationalism, racist animosity, anti-modernism, and anti-republicanism. What all strands had in common, according to Sternhell, was the eternal “theme” of European conservatism. This represented “conservative elites in search of a mob.”⁹⁵

After the crushing defeat of 1940, this “mob” was even easier to find than during the 1880s or the turbulent, crises-laden 1930s. The truce of Compiègne of June 22, 1940, divided France into the occupied North and the unoccupied South. Members of the old government first escaped to Bordeaux and some continued on to North Africa, among

⁹⁴ Bredin, 6.

⁹⁵ Strauss, 457.

them Pierre Mèndes-France and Daladier. Although Pétain had agreed with them to establish a government-in-exile in North Africa, Laval convinced him that it was a bad idea. While they attempted to land in Casablanca, they were arrested by the French army for “plotting” against state security.⁹⁶ Meanwhile the other ministers moved to Clermont-Ferrand and eventually went to Vichy, where Marshal Pétain and Pierre Laval formed the new French state. There was an exodus of French refugees to the West and the South. In the latter, the demarcation line carved out the “free zone” where many Jews would at first be “dumped” by the Germans, and which it was said, only added to the “flood” of Jewish refugees from the previous years.

The French people looked to Pétain in the desperate hope of guidance and protection. The political and intellectual elite, as well as the general public, was in shock and everyone sought someone to accuse. Obvious targets were the politicians of the Third Republic, but particularly Blum, a Jew and a Socialist, and the Popular Front. Also blamed were the immigrants, particularly Jews who it was said had “weakened” France from within. Finally the seemingly under-equipped and unprepared military, which was certainly blamed for having been demoralized too soon and therefore defeated too quickly. This did not really matter, however; the first two, everyone seemed certain, were responsible for France’s defeat and subsequent German occupation.

⁹⁶ Wright, 383-384.

3) Vichy policies:

L'État Français and its *Statuts des Juifs*

*"The government remains free, France will only be administered by Frenchmen."*⁹⁷

The Germans invaded France after Belgium and Holland capitulated in May of 1940. The Wehrmacht broke quickly through to Paris which seemed almost empty after about three million Parisians (of the total of five million) left before German occupation began.⁹⁸ By now it was apparent that the rapid defeat by Germany represented the failure of the political system and leadership of the Republic. Although the "phony war" and the complete military breakdown were a disaster, many considered it a chance for the new government under Marshal Philippe Pétain to reorganize France and improve the nation's status within Europe. Many in the Vichy regime believed that the Pétain government was the necessary national revival. The preservation of the country's power, therefore, as well as the recapture of administrative autonomy and authority became Vichy's primary goal during the collaboration years. Under the stewardship of the "Hero of Verdun," Vichy's National Revolution launched a program to improve social and moral values and to establish political stability. In the end, the most high-profile collaborators, such as Laval, expended most of their energy to make French sovereignty a reality, while the so-called national revolution did not really produce any meaningful changes in society.

After the armistice with the Germans in June 1940, Pétain and his followers took immediate action. Vichy undertook repressive measures against numerous members of

⁹⁷ Pétain speech on June 25 1940, quoted in Adam Nossiter, *The Algeria Hotel: France, Memory, and the Second World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p. 104.

⁹⁸ David Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation, 1940-1944* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 3.

the Third Republic. Subsequently 2,282 civil servants were purged and many leaders of the Republic were placed in protective custody in Château de Chazeron. Among them were Blum and Daladier, who were later tried at Riom in February 1942 by a special High Court. Anyone who had left metropolitan France between May 10 and June 30, including Charles de Gaulle, lost French citizenship.⁹⁹

While this political reorganization satisfied many Vichy supporters, because they could finally reform the French governmental structure, and, in their mind, remove its inherent defects, the new regime also recognized the significance of a program of internal regeneration. According to Vichy family theorists, the Republic had promoted an ideological climate hostile to family values, one that prompted high divorce rates, prostitution, alcoholism, and selfishness. The result was decadence and low birth rates.

Vichy therefore equally desired a social revival and attempted to mold the French people according to the ideals of the National Revolution. Initially, the regime was particularly concerned with morally educating the young. Vichy strongly supported organized youth groups, such as the forest camps of the *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, which was one of the largest groups.¹⁰⁰ The idea was to instill adolescents with dedication to hard work and their country, as well as for authority and hierarchy. Since Vichy's architects believed that the lack of respect for authority had undermined the morale of the

⁹⁹ Milton Dank, *The French against the French: Collaboration and Resistance* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1974), pp. 83 and 86.

¹⁰⁰ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 147. Some historians debate whether the *Chantiers* had been a clandestine war force, training under the eyes of the Germans while only pretending to be a tool for indoctrination. The *Chantiers* had been set up as a measure to take draft-age unemployed from urban centers; in addition, they produced charcoal. Many *Chantiers* members were true believers in the National Revolution and disliked the German occupation; a large number of them would later be sent to work in German factories under the STO. See Roderick Kedward, "The Maquis and the Culture of the Outlaw," in *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology*, ed., Roderick Kedward and Roger Austin (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1985), p. 232; Paxton, *Vichy France*, 164.

military, the youth groups would mold a new generation that would guarantee a firm national consciousness.

Paxton has compared Vichy's youth program to the uniformed youth groups of the 1930s, including the Catholic Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne, the Socialists' Red Falcons, the Young Communists and the Hitler youth. These groups were perfect for indoctrination and prevented social unrest among young men, and eventually, the Germans even forbade Vichy youth organizations in the occupied zone because of their militarist and chauvinist tone. But the numbers of these groups remained small, while Vichy was unable to transform them into a unified national organization. Although a more successful group, the *Chantiers* lost most of its members to the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO, forced labor service in Germany).¹⁰¹

Vichy's indoctrination efforts of youngsters through youth organizations thus did not go very far. The same was true for its attempts to utilize teachers and schools, coordinated and purged in 1940 and 1941. French children were supposed to learn and grow in the spirit of Pétain's National Revolution. The numerous pictures of the Marshal and accounts of his touring the country and visiting with schoolchildren gives testimony to his belief in a healthier society rooted in a strong family. But by late 1942, most educators had become tired of Pétain's ideology and indoctrination. Like the rest of the country, they were more concerned with the constant food shortage, labor demands, and rumors of liberation.

¹⁰¹Paxton, *Vichy France*, 161 and 167. The STO was established in February 1943. See Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 321.

Overall, the National Revolution was a move backwards, towards “good old” values of a traditional conservative country under authoritarian leadership. There was much irony in this nostalgia for values of the past, however. First, in that the constant feeding of that ideology triggered a desire for many to look back longingly to the Third Republic.¹⁰² Equally ironic was the fact that its main creators did not practice or were hardly exemplars of the values that the revolution demanded. In contrast to his celebration of the peasantry and his emphasis of his own rural upbringing, Pétain loved the glamorous world of the most influential politicians and journalists of Paris.¹⁰³ Notwithstanding his aura of grandfatherly benevolence, the Marshal was a childless man of 64 until in 1920 he married a divorcée. General Maxime Weygand, one of Pétain’s most important men in government, came from the upper-class and was illegitimate.¹⁰⁴ What was most ironic, however, was how little compassion the promoters of a better, family-oriented society had for the hundreds of Jewish immigrant families, many of whom would be separated and deported, including the French-born children.

If at all existent, ideological attachment to Pétain’s revolution was only temporary. But the strong desire to bring about a political, economic, and traditional social revival of France, this nostalgia for a better, “healthier” society was fertile ground for ideological groups and parties with fascist leanings or those drawn to Hitlerism. These were particularly the PPF, the PSF, the *Rassemblement National Populaire* (RNP), and later in 1943, the Milice, which was an indigenous paramilitary organization, concerned

¹⁰² Roger Austin, “Political Surveillance and Ideological Control in Vichy France: a Study of Teachers in the Midi, 1940-1944,” in *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology*, ed., Kedward and Austin, p. 32.

¹⁰³ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 124-125.

¹⁰⁴ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 165.

with civil order and became particularly notorious for its torture and killing of Resistance members.¹⁰⁵

Not all of these groups were sympathetic to Nazism, but all agreed on a single-unit leadership. Only a regime of such nature, they believed, could re-establish national unity and promote a national revival. Interestingly, the *Croix de Feu* had explained the decadence and national disarray in terms of the breakdown of authority – of workers challenging their superiors, women challenging men, and liberals (including Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants) challenging God. The “decadent” part of French society, they believed, was a result of liberalism, secularism, socialism, democracy, and internationalism. Jews were part of all of these isms and seemed to have a harmful, de-Christianizing effect on the nation. The traditional and essentially French “spiritual” part of the revival that the groups envisioned was authoritarianism: a return to Christian religion, nationalism, (military) discipline, and acceptance of a distinct social hierarchy.¹⁰⁶

Vichy’s purpose was to protect France and its national interests – the essence of Pétain’s ideals. To collaborate was a necessary measure to regain authority. The atmosphere was filled with ideas of political and social change and a national revival, mixed also with extreme right-wing sentiments that were ideal in promoting racial anti-Semitism among the French. More importantly, it provided a motive for justification for

¹⁰⁵ Paul J. Kingston, “The Ideologists: Vichy France, 1940-1944”, in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, ed., Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (New York: Berg, 1989), p. 57. The Milice had grown out of the *Service d'ordre légionnaire* (SOL) which had been established by Joseph Darnand, a bitter veteran from the extreme right who then became Secretary General of the Milice. See Jackson, *Dark Years*, 230.

¹⁰⁶ Soucy, 175 and 181.

the collaborators to clear the nation of its foreign, degenerative, and overall “undesirable elements.” Therefore, Vichy’s policemen and bureaucrats meticulously, and methodically, followed through with round-ups, selection and transport of Jews to the French concentration camps for deportation. They believed that they were truly serving France and its national revival while also satisfying the Germans and preserving Vichy’s existence.

Thus the Vichy government was obedient to the Germans. Marrus and Paxton have pointed out in *Vichy-France and the Jews* that Vichy’s main desire was to maintain its own sovereignty. Its officials claimed that it tried to keep the French Jews out of German grasp, but in order to do so, foreign Jews had to be handed over. Those who lacked French citizenship were the “few,” they argued, that were sacrificed to save the “many”. Yet in point of fact, Vichy itself implemented anti-Jewish measures before any German pressure to cooperate in solving the “Jewish problem.”¹⁰⁷ And Vichy made sure that the Germans had the full cooperation of French police needed for arrests of Jews and Resistance fighters, as well as roundups and subsequent internments until the deportees could be transported to Eastern Europe. In fact, as many historians in recent years have emphasized, the Germans actually needed the French police and therefore Vichy’s closest cooperation since they only had a limited number of people in France available to investigate, locate, and arrest Jews.¹⁰⁸ All of which puts Vichy’s claims about collaboration into a precarious perspective.

¹⁰⁷ David Pryce-Jones, “Paris during the German Occupation”, in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, ed., Hirschfeld and Marsh, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 234-35.

About 75,000 Jews went to their death this way, about one quarter of whom were French citizens.¹⁰⁹ Vichy's collaboration, then, did not prevent the death of many Jews, but only made it more certain. Although Paxton had said that the Vichy measures had not been meant to kill, the regime made sure that all laws necessary would be implemented that affected the same result. The regime guaranteed that Jews were ready for selection and deportation when in 1942 Western Europe began transporting Jews to Eastern Europe's death camps according to the plans of the Final Solution.

At the same time the French state purged the government of its republican elements, it implemented its anti-Semitic legal measures, the *Statuts des Juifs* in the summer and fall of 1940. The outline of the anti-Jewish measures and their rapid implementation had a strong disrupting effect on the daily life of many Jews. Within a year, the regime passed 26 laws and 24 decrees against Jews, therefore assigning an inferior position to citizens and non-citizens in French society. Following its implementation, one statute excluded French Jews from public service and those professions that had influence on public opinion and education: the officer corps of the armed forces, teaching, journalism, radio, film, theater.¹¹⁰ The enrollment of Jewish students was kept to a minimum of three percent.¹¹¹ In August 1940, the *loi Marchandeaue* (Marchandeaue Law) was repealed which had prohibited, although not prevented, attacks in the press against any racial or religious group. After its repeal, racial anti-Semitism again spread freely in French publications. In July, Pétain ordered the

¹⁰⁹ Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Collaboration in France: Some introductory remarks," in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, ed., Hirschfeld and Marsh, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), p. 56; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 355.

¹¹¹ Dank, 226.

review and re-evaluation of all grants of citizenships to foreign Jews and foreigners since 1927 and those deemed undesirable lost their French citizenship. Eventually about 15,000 lost their citizenship, 6,000 of whom were Jewish, including French-born children of foreigners. Also in July, only those who had a French – that is, non-Jewish – father were admitted to public service. This was applied in the medical field beginning in August, and in September for admission to the bar. In October 1940 a law authorized prefects to intern foreign Jews in “special camps” or force them to live in remote villages (*residence forcée*) under police surveillance.¹¹²

German documents confirm these measures. A report of a meeting in the German embassy in Paris on February 28, 1941, between Ambassador Otto Abetz and SS officer Theodor Dannecker from the Jewish Office revealed that as a result of the Statute of October 4, 40,000 Jews were already interned in camps in the unoccupied zone and that new Jews continued to be arrested.¹¹³ A law of July 1941 made even easier the census of the entire Jewish population in the unoccupied zone.¹¹⁴

While restrictionist laws in France had previously applied to “all” foreigners and foreign Jews, Vichy’s statutes made Jews a particular target for exclusion, humiliation, placement in concentration camps, and eventually deportation. By 1942, the occupied North had fewer of these facilities than the unoccupied South even though Drancy, outside of Paris and staffed by French police, would be the central camp in which the

¹¹² Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 3-4.

¹¹³ Serge Klarsfeld, ed., *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage in Frankreich*, Dokumentationszentrum für Jüdische Zeitgeschichte CDJC Paris. Deutsche Dokumente 1941-1944 (Paris: Klarsfeld, 1977), p. 17.

¹¹⁴ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 355.

deportees from throughout France were ultimately concentrated.¹¹⁵ The trains to Eastern Europe left from there, usually with 1,000 to 1,200 deportees per convoy.¹¹⁶ Some deportees also left from Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande. Since these camps were located in the occupied North, technically Vichy itself never deported Jews to death camps, – at least not directly. Moreover, theoretically, since the deportees were not even French, most collaborators felt no remorse and even later expressed no guilt. In reality there were, of course, French nationals among those who were sent to the death camps, roughly 24,000, including citizens by birth, naturalized citizens, and subjects of France.¹¹⁷ A second Jewish Statute of July 1941 revised the definitions of Jewishness and therefore broadened its application to a larger number of people.¹¹⁸

In the unoccupied zone, these measures were a shock to the Jewish population. For not only did they call for the enumeration of persons required, they demanded detailed personal information, including religious affiliation, degrees earned, military service, professional activities, and listing of personal property.¹¹⁹ Information about the latter was intended to facilitate acquisition of Jewish property and Aryanization.¹²⁰ Vichy made sure that this wealth remained in France and by May 1944, 40,000 Jewish

¹¹⁵ Pryce-Jones, *Paris during the Occupation*, 23.

¹¹⁶ Serge Klarsfeld, ed., *Vichy-Auschwitz: Die Zusammenarbeit der deutschen und französischen Behörden bei der „Endlösung der Judenfrage“ in Frankreich* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1989), p. 333; ed., *Memorial to the Jews deported from France 1942-1944: Documentation of the deportation of victims of the Final Solution in France* (New York: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983), p. xxxvii.

¹¹⁷ Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, *ibid*; ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, *ibid*. The Polish nationals were those most affected by deportations, roughly 26,000; but Germans, Russians, Rumanians and Austrians were not spared, making up, respectively, 7,000, 4,000, 3,000, and 2,500 of the deportees from France. *Ibid.*; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 362.

¹¹⁸ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 355.

¹¹⁹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 100.

¹²⁰ Pryce-Jones, *Paris during the German Occupation*, 22.

businesses were under French trusteeship.¹²¹ Again, the excuse was that those affected were just a “few” French citizens and that the remainder consisted of foreigners who burdened the nation and that handing them over to the Germans was an appropriate solution. Those who carried out these measures, high and low, rationalized that they had only conscientiously fulfilled their duty by following orders.¹²²

Hitler initially did not concern himself with Jews in France, as he was interested in exploiting the country for labor, war material, and food, while using its strategic location for the war on Great Britain. Vichy’s early handling of the “Jewish problem” was therefore proof of the regime’s independent interest in a solution. Already in 1940, Vichy showed itself interested in the overall removal of Jews from society, or as David Pryce-Jones put it, “The persecution of Jews was therefore a matter of voluntary propitiation of Hitlerism.”¹²³ Vichy’s measures and actions facilitated Nazi goals in that region.¹²⁴ Not only that, but the traditional anti-Semitism in France, combined with the persecution of Jewish non-citizens, allowed the French majority to become indifferent to the method of persecution, especially once Vichy’s measures became similar to those of the Nazis in the North and in Germany. In March 1941, the CGQJ, under the militant French anti-Semitic nationalist Xavier Vallat, was established in Vichy. This agency was responsible for Vichy’s anti-Jewish policy in general and for administering anti-Jewish actions in particular. In Paris the *Institut des Question Juives*, led by Paul S  zille, was

¹²¹ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 357.

¹²² Levendel, 275.

¹²³ Pryce-Jones, *Paris during the German Occupation*, 21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

also responsible for disseminating anti-Semitic propaganda. Its official appearance made racial persecution seem in line with public opinion.¹²⁵

The legislative measures taken by Vichy, therefore, guaranteed the social and economic exclusion of Jews from French society and paved the way for their removal. “By first enumerating the Jews, then despoiling them,” Adam Nossiter explains, “the bureaucrats smoothed the transition from economic to physical elimination.”¹²⁶ The collaboration of Vichy and the French officials made clear that their goals were similar to those of the Nazis’. If the goal of Nazi Germany had “only” been the “permanent and irreversible aggrandizement of power” in Europe, French collaboration would have been based on economic reasons and political self-interest. In that case Jews, both French and foreign would have been safe and Vichy would have been, as Pétain and Laval argued, a means to prevent the worst, a “shield” against German territorial expansion and the tight grip of the Gestapo.¹²⁷

However, it was the racial aspect of the Nazi regime’s goals that made French collaboration in these policies immoral. It was not a matter of preventing the worst, but rather of not participating in the worst. By implementing racially discriminatory laws directly targeted at Jews, gathering “undesirables” into *residences forcées* and concentration camps run by French police, collecting denunciations of Jews with the help of the *gestapistes*, French members of the Gestapo, and eventually handing over 75, 000 Jews to the German officials in the occupied zone who put them on the trains to Eastern

¹²⁵ Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich*, 86.

¹²⁶ Nossiter, 184.

¹²⁷ Pryce-Jones, *Paris during the Occupation*, 17.

European death camps, Vichy's collaboration made certain direct French involvement in the Holocaust.

Conscientious bureaucrats were thus turned, and turned themselves, into traitors through Vichy's collaboration. Between 300,000 to 400,000 French joined German military organizations, such as the *Waffen SS*, the *gestapistes*, or became members of the PSF or RNP. Thousands worked for the Germans directly, growing food, laboring in factories and producing parts for the Nazi war machine.¹²⁸ Vichy believed, at least at the beginning, that it could appease the German occupier in the North, and that it could work out some means of peaceful and beneficial coexistence.

And at first, Pierre Laval protected French Jews by sacrificing foreign ones. But eventually he did the same with French Jews as with foreign Jews for political concessions. He saw Jews as pawns to be used in the "struggle with the never-ending German demands for labor, food, and raw materials."¹²⁹ Laval himself was not a racist, but he was completely indifferent to the fate of Jews and foreigners, even of thousands of children as long as he could maintain the illusion of France's independent place in Hitler's New World Order.

Particularly revealing is a report made by Dannecker about the "results of negotiations with the French government" from July 6, 1942. In these negotiations, Laval suggested that Jewish families deported from the unoccupied zone should be accompanied by children under sixteen. His indifference became most obvious through the next comment in the report: "The question of Jewish children remaining in the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁹ Dank, 230; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 322.

occupied zone is of no interest to him.” It seems that Laval’s suggestions came as somewhat a surprise because Dannecker urged Berlin for “immediate decision” of whether Jewish children under sixteen could be deported with “approximately” the fifteenth convoy from France.¹³⁰ It was convenient for Laval that the children were the problem of the officials in the occupied North. Later at his trial Laval professed that he had really believed the German assurances that the Jews were being deported for labor in the East or that a “special territory” was being established for them.¹³¹ The documents indicate otherwise.

In his letter to Bousquet, containing in detail the dates of planned deportations, Leguay described the background of Jews to be deported the following summer. The Jews for July 31 and August 3, 5, and 7 were foreign, as well as those from the free zone for August 10, 12, 14, and 17. The trains of August 19, 21, 24, and 26 would contain the children of parents who had been interned at Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande.¹³² The background of the Jewish children is not mentioned at all; the fact, that they were French did not really matter anymore and probably never had. This was nothing personal; only French state affairs were. Laval was determined to achieve his political goals and he was willing to let Jews pay the price.

Pierre Laval’s determination and confidence stemmed from his long career in French politics. Laval famously had always had a foot in both camps, mainly because of his mastery of the French parliamentary system. This had made him a skilled negotiator

¹³⁰ Klarsfeld, ed., *Endlösung der Judenfrage in Frankreich*, 80.

¹³¹ Pierre Laval, *The Diary of Pierre Laval* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), p. 98.

¹³² Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, 118; Klarsfeld in Ahlrich Meyer, *Täter im Verhör: Die „Endlösung der Judenfrage“ in Frankreich 1940-1944* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), pp. 160-161.

and that skill came in handy when dealing with the Germans. It was certainly not a coincidence that he became the most important contact for them. Laval had already supported a policy of Franco-German rapprochement in 1918, and in 1931, he said that since France and Germany would always be neighbors, they would have to get along. Revealing his equally strong pacifist attitude, Laval declared that Europe's security depended on this entente. Great Britain, towards whom he felt considerable suspicion, he believed should stay out of European affairs and refrain from its balance-of-power policy on the continent.¹³³ Historians have seen Laval as a devious man, but he was certainly clever. Although Pétain and many Vichy officials distrusted and did not like him, they, like Laval himself, considered him indispensable in dealing with the Germans.¹³⁴

After the Germans settled in the North and Pétain and his entourage arrived in Vichy, there was a widespread feeling of "revulsion" against those Frenchmen who had failed France. The conservative and fascist-rightist argument that parliamentary democrats had lost France the war became universally accepted.¹³⁵ The new regime immediately began to move these "traitors" out of the way so they could concentrate on the reconstruction of France according to their reactionary ideals as well as on finding a place in the German orbit. The latter, the Germans realized quickly, was the biggest desire of the French, while at the same time their biggest weakness; Vichy's heart, through which they could control the French and ensure their cooperation. The hints at changes and promises to make changes in the armistice agreement, particularly regarding

¹³³ Geoffrey Warner, *Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp.11 and 23.

¹³⁴ Wright, 371.

¹³⁵ Wright, 384.

the release of French POWs, occupation costs, and territorial concessions were the Nazis' most powerful control tool when dealing with Vichy.¹³⁶

As for the Germans, historians often agree that they preferred native and benign leaders in the countries they occupied, rather than fanatic followers of the Nazis. This is exactly why the German occupation officials felt they could rely on Pétain and Laval; they were both desperate to fulfill German demands to gain more autonomy.¹³⁷ But while Vichy officials believed in their own illusion, that they were protecting France's values and patriotism, German authorities wanted tranquility for their own ends, but tranquility only according to German occupation standards. This put tremendous pressure on Vichy and Laval. As a result, the French public was increasingly divided over collaboration, the unfulfilled promises by Laval, and the brutal measures against the Jews. Beginning in 1943, the exchange of reprisals between the Germans and French collaborators and the members of the Resistance made many feel that there was a war on the inside; French were fighting against the French.

Meanwhile, Vichy's adoption of Nazi Germany's policies to its own territory hurt its claim of independence. Vichy's collaboration, denunciations and interrogations, the work done for the CGQJ and the cooperation of the *prefectures de police*, collectively bore the methods and criteria of the Nazis.¹³⁸ Even earlier, the French had already disregarded basic human rights by rapidly interning foreign Jews, Spanish reds, communists, and gypsies. The internments before the deportations had caused the death

¹³⁶ Dank, 225.

¹³⁷ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 266.

¹³⁸ Pryce-Jones, *Paris during the German Occupation*, 31.

of about 4,000 Jews due to camp conditions that were worse than those in Nazi concentration camps of the 1930s.¹³⁹ In October 1941, Germans gave orders to French overseers to permit the release of about 900 sick persons from Drancy.¹⁴⁰ The conditions in Compiègne were equally horrifying as described by Pastor Marc Boegner, president of the Protestant Federation in a letter from March 21, 1942, to Frédéric Barbey of the International Committee of the Red Cross:

Dear Sir,

I have received the most alarming news from Paris about the sanitary conditions of camp Compiègne where the transferred Jews from the Drancy camp or those brought directly from Paris after their arrest are interned. It is impossible for me to communicate via letter to you the agonizing details that were given to me about the moral and sanitary situation in which the internees find themselves. [...]¹⁴¹

Barbey's reply to Boegner's letter made clear that there was not much he could do since this was a "purely political affair." The relief organization could not intervene. He added that if they were too persistent, it could have negative consequences for all the other activities of the committee.¹⁴²

At the time that conditions improved in the detention centers, particularly Drancy, the infamous arrests and deportations of the spring and summer of 1942 began.¹⁴³ French documentation, index cards from September 1940, as well as denunciation letters which poured into the CGQJ, were used to locate the future deportees. The most infamous operation was that of July 16 and 17 in Paris during which 9,000 French policemen (consisting of gendarmes, Gardes Mobile, and police academy cadets) and members of

¹³⁹ Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, xvi; Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 176 and 363.

¹⁴⁰ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 360.

¹⁴¹ Marc Boegner in Serge Klarsfeld, ed., *Recueil de documents des archives de Comité international de la Croix-Rouge sur le sort des juifs de France internés et déportés, 1939-1945*, Vol.1 (Paris: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1999), p. 368.

¹⁴² Ibid, 370.

¹⁴³ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 360.

the anti-Jewish police of the CGQJ, assisted by roughly 400 of Doriot's Fascists of the PPF participated in the arrests. Although the operation had been rescheduled from July 14 to July 16 so as to not upset the French public during their celebration of Bastille Day, the police forces made a mistake by continuing the arrests until eleven o'clock the next morning. Frenchmen going to work then saw everything. The result of these arrests were 12,884 internees who were sorted at collection centers, local schools, gymnasiums, and auditoriums according to whether they were single individuals and families without children and sent to Drancy. The remaining, those with families, went to the Paris bicycle arena, the Vélodrome d'Hiver, a name which became synonymous with the July 16 operation. These internees stayed there for several days until being transferred to special camps and then finally transported to the East. The carefully compiled lists and Vichy's establishment of special camps in the unoccupied zone would come in handy for the Germans. The timing could not have been better.

Between March and the end of the year, 41,951 foreign, French, and stateless Jews between the ages of 16 and 60 from both zones were arrested. Although the goal of deporting 100,000 from France that year was not accomplished, German authorities expressed satisfaction, as the target number of about 40,000 Jews, including 10,000 from the unoccupied zone, had been met.¹⁴⁴ At some point, Laval and Bousquet had agreed to send about 30,000 to 32,000 from the unoccupied zone. Klarsfeld concludes that the

¹⁴⁴ Dank, 240 and 242; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 218; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 66.

protective status of French Jews would soon have expired since Laval and Bousquet wanted to keep their promises to the Germans.¹⁴⁵

The terrible handling of the internment of Jews in the unoccupied zone in 1941 and first half of 1942 was one of the most important factors after the summer of 1942 that contributed to the French people's changing view of the Vichy regime and caused the public to become aware of the real purpose of the camps. In addition to the indiscreet public nature of the arrests, the French authorities had made other mistakes. For one, they actually had detained small children. The arrest of children in France was at first against German plans, pregnant women and women with children under two years old being exempt from arrest, at least in initially. Knowing that the anti-German sentiment was widespread and that it would remain, the occupying authorities rightly feared an escalation of hostile public reactions to the German Gestapo forcing children into camps. Moreover, they calculated that allowing the French police to arrest adult foreigners would appeal to national xenophobia.¹⁴⁶

When the children ended up in the key camps in the occupied North from where trains left for the East, the authorities decided to separate them from their parents as they now were "stuck" with the children, particularly since the deportation of children from France had not yet been authorized by German officials. In broad daylight, as passersbys watched, French policemen beat mothers with sticks to separate them. Many children got lost and stood "unclaimed" in the camps. Once the parents were deported, some of those children left behind could not be identified because they were so young they could not

¹⁴⁵ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ Dank, 225 and 241.

remember their name.¹⁴⁷ Many children were assisted by relief organizations that would put them in homes. Some parents even tried to hand them to strangers to spare them the suffering of the transports. Eventually, many children were deported with adults to make it seem that families were being transported together to the East to work in German factories, as at this point, they were told they were “only” being deported for forced labor.¹⁴⁸

At the Wannsee Conference in Berlin in January of 1942, German leadership had unanimously decided upon the plans for the “Final Solution” of the Jewish Question. Jews were to be deported from the entire Third Reich and occupied territories to Eastern European camps. Upon arrival, they would be either selected for forced labor, which the majority of the time would lead to their death within weeks, or for immediate killing in gas chambers, and by other methods, such as random executions. That same year, Vichy and the German occupation officials had deported the highest number of Jews from France, sending 41,951 people in 43 convoys. In 1943 and 1944 the number of deportees from France decreased, with 17,069 and 14,833 respectively.¹⁴⁹ The main reasons for the decline in these years were due to the military successes of the Allies in North Africa, Italy, and Normandy, and the Red Army in the East that interrupted transportation.

¹⁴⁷ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust*, 113-114; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 138 and ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, xv; Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 249 and 252-255; Dank, 241-242. The relief organizations arranged children’s homes or placed the children in foster care with French families. Later, many of these children had to be dispersed and their true identities concealed. While some managed to escape abroad with the help of the OSE, many children were raised in French families as Catholics which, as several historians commented, led to the loss of Jewish identity. See especially Zuccotti, *The Holocaust* and Jacques Adler, *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹⁴⁸ Zuccotti, *ibid*; Klarsfeld, *ibid*; Dank, *ibid*.

¹⁴⁹ Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, xxiii and ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 330-332. In *French Children of the Holocaust: A Memorial* Klarsfeld, Cohen, and Epstein estimated that about 11,000 children were deported; this included all ages between four and one half months to 17 years of age.

Most importantly, the majority of the French public had turned against Vichy as result of the regime's brutal treatment of Jews. Even Vichy had begun to hesitate, refusing assistance by French police in arresting French Jews and rejecting the German demand to implement the wearing of the yellow star in the unoccupied zone. However, it agreed in December 1942 to stamp Jewish papers, ration and identification cards with *Juif/Juive*, which made them easy targets for arrests.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, with Allied victories growing and the Resistance becoming bolder and more aggressive, many Frenchmen began to hide Jews, foreign and French, adults and children alike, and French policemen often would leak information about upcoming raids.¹⁵¹

Although this shift in public opinion and Vichy's response to it saved many Jews, all too many nonetheless ended up in Auschwitz. The age group mostly affected ranged between 30 and 44 with 23,086 deportees overall, followed by those 45 through 59 with 19,971, and 18 through 29 with 8,460. There were among the deportees, about 1,893 children under the age of six, and 227 seniors over the age of 80. Klarsfeld estimates that the number of names missing from the lists and ages unknown exceeded 4,800. But he is certain that all of the children who were deported died and he estimates that only 2,500 adult survivors existed in 1945 and that most of them were men.¹⁵²

Those who returned to France found their homes emptied and occupied by Frenchmen or bombed, their shops and businesses belonging to Frenchmen. Most of the survivors tried to "melt" back into society and move on with their lives without talking

¹⁵⁰ Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, xvi; Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 371.

¹⁵¹ Dank, 241.

¹⁵² Klarsfeld, ed., *Memorial to the Jews*, xxiii and ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 333.

about their experiences or without seeking revenge. The new Republic gave government subsidies to Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the war, while some surviving Jews, who could not regain their property, turned for help to organizations such as the AJDC.¹⁵³

Creating Jewish networks of assistance could be dangerous, because it would emphasize Jewish particularities that survivors did not want. Such postwar welfare programs had the effect of silencing discussion of the Holocaust as it did the losses of many war victims.¹⁵⁴

Overall, however, everyone tried to forget the miserable years of the occupation and the war. Although the thirst for revenge was the same in 1944 as in 1940 and many innocent people would die, initial purges at Liberation in 1944 and in 1945.¹⁵⁵ The need for national reconciliation and for the French to move on became the primary concern of the politicians of the Fourth Republic. At the expense of the remaining victims of the persecutions, tortures, and deportations, the new government declared Vichy an aberration in French history and suppressed any discussion about the events during this time. This remarkably was not French history.

At the same time, Charles de Gaulle attributed liberation to the French and not so much to the Allies.¹⁵⁶ Only the efforts of the Resistance and the Free French under the leadership of the General de Gaulle were allowed to enter the school books as French history during World War II. These years were shrouded in a heroic and mysterious tale of a nation that had, to some degree secretly, resisted the German oppressor. It was then

¹⁵³ The AJDC had created welfare institutions, returning refugees centers and unemployment agencies. See Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.83-84.

¹⁵⁴ Mandel, 84.

¹⁵⁵ Austin, 29; Dank, 314-315.

¹⁵⁶ Lauten, 59.

in 1944 and 1945 that the “Gaullist myth of resistance” was born, or as filmmaker Jacques Audiard put it, “the biggest lie of our generation was created.” As Kathryn Lauten explains, France had collaborated for four years and now tried to reconstruct its identity around this great lie.¹⁵⁷ Everyone else, who did not want to tell lies, fell silent.

It would take years before historians, at first mainly from outside France and French filmmakers to break the silence about the country’s collaboration and the role in the Holocaust. When they finally appeared, testimonies of the victims and their stories, as recorded in numerous memoirs and films like *The Sorrow and the Pity*, revealed the darkest chapter of France’s war-time history.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

4) “Their” Stories: Memoirs and Documents

*“Conscientious fulfillment of duty”
“Nothing had changed.”¹⁵⁸*

The memoirs of victims of Vichy’s policy of collaboration and participation in the Final Solution are plentiful. Many of these were written by survivors who were children during the Second World War, but some were perceived by adults who died during or shortly thereafter. Particularly interesting are those by children, what are termed “children survivors” because they offer a different perspective. They can see through the eyes of the present, decades after the war, and are able to draw upon hindsight and the considerable academic research. But most important is that they have a personal involvement in this long-gone event.

One major theme these memoirs share is the duality of Vichy and the collaboration years. The role of the perpetrator and victim are interchangeable. The story of their lives during the war is both complex and simple: it seems that so many Frenchmen were faced with difficult choices regarding collaboration and resistance. In *Not the Germans Alone: A Son’s Search for the Truth of Vichy*, Isaac Leventel describes his effort to find the records of his mother’s arrest and dispatch to the death camps. During his investigative journey, he found many French officials who told him how difficult and complex it was “back then,” when one had been obligated to fulfill one’s duty to France, or that anyway “there would have been someone else to do the job.”

¹⁵⁸ The words of Gilbert Michlin in *Of no interest to the nation: A Jewish family in France, 1925-1945. A Memoir* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

These were the familiar responses, rehearsed and evasive, from those who recalled either as officials or just having lived through the period.

Memoirs written by children of victims show the events through young eyes that saw things more simply, theirs being the view that the *milicien* or administrative official could have made the choice not to collaborate, not to arrest families or to put their names on lists. Still, there is a recognition even in these accounts, of a certain complexity of the situation. The issue of “difficult choices under occupation” that the decisions one made were moral ones, matters of decency and humanity and therefore simple, and vice versa, dominate the recent literature on the subject.

British historian Robert Gildea in *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France during the German Occupation* reveals how there were various versions of life in occupied France and under Vichy that were simultaneously in existence.¹⁵⁹ While individuals as well as communities as a whole sometimes went out of their way to assist victims, the village of Prélénfrey-du-Guâ being a moving example, there were other cases where communities organized witch-hunts, sometimes with the blessings of the church.¹⁶⁰ Many memoirs talk about denunciations of Jews, and even Resistance fighters, for petty reasons of jealousy and financial gain, but also emphasize the fact that denunciation letter writers were French. In one instance, the Resistance captured some Gestapo records in Saint-Étienne that listed 15 German Gestapo members, but some three hundred *gestapistes*. One of the most shameful examples of the complex motives that determined

¹⁵⁹ Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France during the German Occupation* (New York: Picador, 2004), p. 17.

¹⁶⁰ Gildea, 15-16. See David Klugman, *The Conspiracy of the Righteous: The Silence of the village of Prélénfrey-du-Guâ saved Jewish Children and Adults in 1944* (Nîmes: Lacour, 1995).

the actions or behavior of individuals is the case cited by Dank in his study of certain upper-class collaborators who hide Jews, but only after the Allied landings in Normandy so as to evade punishment after the war.¹⁶¹

Unfortunately, the “collective silence” that for so long covered this period of French history served both sides, those who behaved well and those who did not. Many on both sides wished to forget the experience as if it were a bad dream. While the silence of the entire village of Prélénfrey-du-Guâ saved many hidden Jews from suspicious Nazis in 1944, the decision of many other Frenchmen to be quiet when neighbors were denounced and arrested cost many Jews and others their lives.

While this passivity displayed by the French can be justified as prompted by the instinct of survival or basic human fear, it is the Vichy government’s unscrupulous support of the German cause that deserves chastisement. This is especially true in looking at their actions and policies regarding Jews. When considering the experiences of Jews, as is revealed in reading their memoirs and letters, the full implications of Vichy’s collaboration can be seen. Vichy’s actions, and those who supported them, were racially motivated, regardless of whether the Jews they handed over to the Germans were French citizens or not. Jewish immigrants had come to France looking for freedom from religious, cultural, and personal persecution; they had counted on the “liberal French tradition” ensuring them a life without oppression. Many Jews had fled Eastern Europe’s pogroms in the late 19th century, and later from Germany’s and Austria’s anti-Jewish

¹⁶¹ Dank, 220.

policies in the 1930s to start a new life in France. As it turned out, they had gone from one center of racial prejudice to another.¹⁶²

Those Jews who had been established in French society were particularly stunned by the way they were treated by Pétain's regime. In her memoir, *The Open Window*, Georgette Elgey describes growing up during those years and how her grandmother, a high society dame, epitomized the situation in which the Jewish elite found itself. Generally, French Jews felt safe because they were so French, as Elgey observed about her grandmother:

She belonged to that section of Jewish high society that was profoundly chauvinist and xenophobe – even, I now have to admit, anti-semitic, at least towards Jews only recently settled in France. Nor was she aware of running any great risk in refusing to comply with the occupying power's legislation. What could possibly happen to her? At the very most she might be fined. Could she not show proof of several generations of ancestors who had rendered distinguished service to France, as the saying went? Didn't she know the Marshal personally?¹⁶³

Only through her wealth and her well-established contacts with important officials and other influential friends could the Elgey family escape with false documents to the unoccupied zone.¹⁶⁴ Yet, the social status and long friendships of Georgette's family could not prevent a degrading and abusive interrogation as they crossed the border into the unoccupied zone. And further harassment followed while living there. When they returned to Paris, they found their apartment intact and undisturbed, being among the lucky few.

Elgey as well as Levendel describes the attitude that was common among the Jewish community of France at the time: confidence of the French and established Jews

¹⁶² Levendel, 11.

¹⁶³ Georgette Elgey, *The Open Window* (London: Woburn Press, 1974), p. 20.

¹⁶⁴ Refugees, except the really established ones, from the occupied zone were banned from Vichy, beginning June 6, 1941; See Nossiter, 194.

that they would remain untouched because they were citizens and had been assimilated. There was also their confidence that their social status and connections to the economic and intellectual elite would protect them. Levendel describes how his mother felt “unaffected” even after the deportations in 1942.¹⁶⁵ But this atmosphere, as Elgey reflects, had a “quality of unreality.”¹⁶⁶ There were a few who accurately assessed the imminent danger in Vichy’s support of the Germans. They sold their businesses, changed names, and went into hiding and consequently many of them survived.¹⁶⁷

The historian Yerachmiel Cohen confirms that there was a “profound” gap between native French Jews and immigrant foreign Jews. The former thought that they were naturally worlds apart from the latter, who were a poor and isolated group that lacked ties to French culture. Many French Jews also believed that France would uphold its “liberal traditions” which led them to trust Pétain. A German document of February 1941 confirms that the “big and wealthy” Jews had thus far been able to save themselves from internment because of their connections, wealth and connections that went all the way up to Pétain.¹⁶⁸ To some extent, French Jews even believed in Vichy, for many, according to Cohen, supported Vichy’s principles, with its emphasis on family values and work, service to France, and immigration restriction.¹⁶⁹

The French Jewish community was in fact divided and the reactions to the anti-Semitic measures therefore varied greatly. On the one side, was the Central Consistory

¹⁶⁵ Levendel, 54.

¹⁶⁶ Elgey, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Dank, 87.

¹⁶⁸ Klarsfeld, ed., *Endlösung der Judenfrage in Frankreich*, 17.

¹⁶⁹ Yerachmiel (Richard) Cohen, “The Jewish Community of France in the face of Vichy-German persecution, 1940-44,” in *The Jews in Modern France*, ed., Malino and Wasserstein, pp. 183-185.

and on the other, supporters and members of the *Comité de Coordination des Oeuvres de Bienfaisance Israélites à Paris* (Coordinating Committee for Jewish Charities in Paris), established in 1941 and consisting of French and immigrant welfare organizations. Although many in the Consistory, who represented more established, richer Jews, felt betrayed after the implementation of the statutes in 1940 and the arrests in 1941, they insisted on communicating privately with Pétain, emphasizing their loyalty to France but refraining from public protest. As mentioned, Paula Hyman notes how the immigrant Jews had made the native French Jews seem increasingly foreign, and according to Cohen, they therefore wanted to “minimize their identification with the foreign elements of the community.” The Consistory did not want to draw attention through public protests in 1941, thereby risking highlighting their “difference” from their French compatriots. The Consistory complained to Laval and Pétain, as well as the cabinet, prefects and journalists about the upcoming arrests of 1942. Yet they failed to act, while many Jewish leaders of the *Comité* were much more active by coordinating numerous welfare organizations and providing much-needed assistance to both native and foreign Jews.¹⁷⁰

In 1941, Vallat helped to create the *Union Générale des Israélites de France* (UGIF) which had been established as a French version of the *Judenräte* (Jewish councils) and which answered to Vichy with a representative from each zone. While many had criticized the Consistory for their passivity, it was the UGIF that had, albeit involuntarily, contributed to the deportation of many Jews, including about three hundred children in 1944 that had been placed in their homes in the Paris area. Although the

¹⁷⁰ Cohen, 186-88.

members knew about upcoming raids, they did not destroy the lists that documented the locations of these children. The leaders were afraid of being arrested themselves or of triggering reprisal mass arrests. Many Jews reprimanded the UGIF for their behavior and serious errors of judgment.¹⁷¹ They accused the Union of having played a role in the destruction of their own people, because they had given into German demands too easily.

The reaction by the Jewish community to immigration, anti-Semitic measures, and later to the truth about the fate of the deportees very much overlapped with that of the French. So many people had welcomed immigration restriction and economic reforms, feeling that the country was disintegrating. When Vichy took measures that were exclusively anti-Semitic and based on racial prejudice, the French public, including some established Jews thought it was necessary. When the truth about the actions of the Nazis and Vichy began to sink into the public mind, many refused to believe that something like that could be real. The systematic killing, such a degree of horror and insanity, as Elzey and many others have called it, was impossible to imagine.¹⁷² This denial had unfortunate consequences for the victims, but it would help many perpetrators and “passive” resisters during Liberation and after the war.

As difficult as it was to comprehend the events that were going on around them, as soon as they came to realize what was happening, many Frenchmen began to help Jews in any way they could to save their lives. And although never enough to stop the collaborators, the efforts of numerous Frenchmen helped save Jews and are testimony to

¹⁷¹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 108-109; Curtis, 210; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 316; Adler, *Jews of Paris*, 222-223.

¹⁷² Elzey, 21.

human compassion. There are accounts of selfless support of Jewish refugees. Some were taken in as children by French families or nuns in convents after their Jewish family member(s) had been deported. Others were hidden in basements, barns, hidden closets, and empty buildings. The OSE worked inexhaustibly, often in cooperation with the Society of Friends and the Red Cross and with the help of prefects, sub-prefects and mayors, to find homes for the children. In addition, they smuggled the children across the border to Switzerland and Spain with the aid of schoolteachers, local officials and policemen who looked the other way, as well as pastors, priests and paid guides. The AJDC also helped by giving money to non-Jewish families to take in children and their escorts.¹⁷³ The network was successful in clearing the homes and relocating many children before unannounced raids.¹⁷⁴ There were two exceptions: the children's homes in Izieu and Saint-Étienne de Crossey were raided by Gestapo in 1944 and all children subsequently perished in concentration camps. Klarsfeld has published *The Children of Izieu: A Human Tragedy* (1984) in which he elucidates the arrest of 43 children which all died in the East, most of them in Auschwitz. Still, the OSE, with the help of the French, saved 72, 400 Jewish children under the age of 18.¹⁷⁵

In addition to the refusal by Vichy to impose the wearing of the yellow star in the unoccupied zone, there seem to have been three significant actions which speak for the Vichy regime's argument that they had tried to protect French Jews. One was that its laws allowed for exemptions. People were initially not arrested if they were under 18 and over

¹⁷³ Vivette Samuel, *Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. xii; Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 309; Curtis, 204-205.

¹⁷⁴ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 308.

¹⁷⁵ Samuel, *ibid.* There were, according to Samuel, an estimated 84,000 Jewish children who lived in France in 1940. See p. xix.

60 with a French spouse or were parents who had children under five years old.

Individuals were also exempt if they had distinguished themselves in the French military, and families whose French ancestry could be traced back five generations or more. There were several officials in the Vichy government who had Jewish friends and who granted exemptions. They were particularly helpful in helping certain Jews to evade the stamping of personal papers; Pétain himself signed for three Jewish aristocratic women and de Brinon had to make an appeal on behalf of his wife née Frank.¹⁷⁶ Eventually when numbers were short and actual arrests were made, Bousquet revised some of these exemption categories to meet the numbers he had agreed on with the Germans.¹⁷⁷ A result of this would be his order to French police to find more Jews, including the order of August 1942 to arrest French-born children in Bordeaux who had been placed in homes or with relief organizations.¹⁷⁸ Bousquet also denied the emigration of 1,000 Jewish children to the United States in an effort to increase his numbers.¹⁷⁹

Only two moves made by Vichy remain that can be interpreted as an attempt to protect French Jews. One was the refusal by Pétain to revoke French Jews' citizenship for those who had been naturalized after 1927. But in the end he allowed exceptions. The other way in which the regime had tried to protect Jews was to refuse to hand over to the Germans the list of French Jews.¹⁸⁰ Laval had already allowed a census of all Jews in the unoccupied zone in 1941 and thus that list certainly already existed. Interestingly enough, Levendel found a document signed by Aimé Autrand, a civil servant from the local

¹⁷⁶ Dank, 230.

¹⁷⁷ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 143.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 143, 150 and 157.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁸⁰ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 290.

Jewish division, in which Autrand urged the prefect of Vaucluse and the mayors of the department to prepare secretly a “preliminary list of all the Jews, French or foreign, or reputed Jews,” according to the law of early June that year.¹⁸¹ Together with Laval and Bousquet, it was zealots like Autrand whose eager administrative efforts exceeded German expectations.

All three of these alleged efforts by Vichy “on behalf of the Jews” give the impression that the regime knew exactly what it was trying to save the French Jews from. As the memoirs of Isaac Levendel and Gilbert Michlin indicate, many collaborators were fully aware of the fate that awaited the Jews after they were deported from Drancy and other such concentration camps in France. Because of their hesitancy and resistance to deporting children, Levendel asserts, it was clear that they knew.¹⁸²

The following conversation between Pastor Boegner and Laval in which Boegner attempted to persuade Laval to reject the anti-Jewish policies reveals the extent to which the fate of Jews was known and denied:

“Do you intend to carry out a manhunt?”
“They will be searched for everywhere that they are hidden.”
“Will you allow us to save the children?”
“The children must remain with their parents.”
“But you must know that they will be separated from them?”
“No.”
“I tell you that it is so.”
“What do you want to do with the children?”
“French families will adopt them.”
“I don’t want that. Not one must remain in France!”¹⁸³

Eventually, Laval decided that children under sixteen should be deported as well. Such action is why historian Milton Dank says that Laval was the final arbiter of the fate of the

¹⁸¹ Levendel, 267.

¹⁸² Ibid., 263-266.

¹⁸³ Dank, 231.

Jews.¹⁸⁴ Since he always saw them as “currency” in his negotiations with the Germans, their fate was sealed.

The fact that collaborators like Laval had knowledge of what was happening in the death camps and therefore of the racial aspects of Vichy’s program to solve the “Jewish problem” in France, suggests that French policies and actions reflected racial prejudices. This was particularly true for those who were not French citizens. Cultural anxiety, traditional anti-Semitism, and xenophobia only partially explain French motivations, for in this instance to collaborate in the Final Solution indicates that the French too clearly had racial motivations.

After the war, when the French desired to forget the Vichy episode and the collaboration that went on in North and South, and the way they had contributed to the Holocaust, they took comfort in the notion that the Jews had really been a burden. As the son of a Vichy cabinet minister put it, “But there was a Jewish problem before the war!”¹⁸⁵ Most French citizens wanted to retain their veneration of Pétain, but blend out the other painful aspects of the period. The historian Adam Nossiter, who spent three years living in three different French cities researching his study of French memory of the war, indicates in *The Algeria Hotel: France, Memory, and the Second World War*, that even forty-odd years after the war the feeling was wide-spread that the Jews, the Holocaust, and the memory militants’ reminding everyone about France’s contribution to deportations were, in the view of those interviewed, blocking a healthy relationship with

¹⁸⁴ Dank, 230.

¹⁸⁵ Nossiter, 175.

the past.¹⁸⁶ The question was whether these actions, or inactions, had been racially motivated and prompted by the same kind of anti-Semitism that existed there as in Germany. For if the motivation for the persecution of Jews on the French side had not been racial, the widely held self-image that the French entertained of a French people actively fighting or participating in the Resistance would have been easier. But, as the memoirs and recent studies make clear, it is hard to keep alive this myth of mass participation in the Resistance or that no one knew of the death camps. As Nossiter reveals in his study, there are still Frenchmen today who have Jewish friends only if they are truly French, that is, assimilated and detached from any Jewish traditions. One of the Vichy natives whom Nossiter interviewed put it this way: he has Jewish friends himself, good ones, but only because they “don’t have the Jewish spirit,” but who are like the French, “sporting, *bon vivants*.”¹⁸⁷ It is equally clear that there remains the same anti-Semitism in France when the daughter of a count explains that anti-Jewish sentiments are common among the generation of her father. “He just can’t stand Jews. It’s almost something physical. He’s just disgusted by them. I can’t explain it.”¹⁸⁸ But she also reveals that her own generation has reasons to dislike Jews when she commented that the Papon trial had only been for the Jews.¹⁸⁹

While some Frenchmen might downplay the fact that for many the resentment toward Jews is simply a part of French culture, it was this “tradition” that had had such terrible consequences for many people during the war. Nossiter says, “the mere mention

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Nossiter, 177.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

of Jews was often accompanied by some expression of dissatisfaction with them. I began to wonder what the practical consequences of this sentiment might be for Vichy's relationship with the past." As Nossiter continued to dwell on the aristocrat's observation about her father's attitude, he realized the danger inherent in this justification of "traditional" anti-Semitism. "If Jews were the essence of the problem, what might be the solution?"¹⁹⁰ If anti-Semitism in France remains tightly nestled in French culture even today, certainly it existed during the war. The events leading up to the conflict and the war itself, with its chaos, political and social discontent, gave many people justification to release their frustrations and racial prejudices towards Jews in particular.

Anti-Semitism in France was already widespread in the 19th century, but it was still mostly in context with cultural integration and envy of economic success. Frenchmen disliked Jews because they were not Christian and therefore strange and outsiders in the French community. Although Jews were dedicated to France, their being different through their religious ties meant that they did not really want to become completely French. In addition, they had become financially successful since emancipation at the end of the 18th century. But many Frenchmen felt that they were somehow only wealthy because in their role as shopkeepers, lenders, and financiers they had "sucked" the money out of hard-working citizens. The increasing racial tone in the press was fueled by the pseudo-science of race as well as financial scandals and the Dreyfus Affair, all of which confirmed for many Frenchmen that Jews were not only foreign but a threat and a disintegrating force within French society. The political and economic crises of the 1920s

¹⁹⁰ Nossiter, 178.

and 1930s – the Depression, the Stavisky scandal, the animosity towards Blum and the Popular Front, the wide-spread belief that Bolshevism was a “Jewish conspiracy” – and the influx of Jewish immigrants had intensified these resentments.

Although their country was void of national cohesion, there was this consensus among the French after 1940: they had to restore France’s autonomy, national pride, and honor. This could only be done by a national regeneration, and this, in turn, could only occur if there was extensive collaboration at the highest and the lowest level of society and bureaucracy with the German conquerors; in the words of Leventel, “staying on the job was in line with national interest.”¹⁹¹ But the eagerness of prefects, police chiefs, and Vichy ministers to meet every demand of the Germans to obtain almost any political concession surprised the Germans, exceeding many times what they had expected from French collaboration. The Jews were dispensable because they were foreign or perceived to be different. They were therefore vulnerable to denunciation and betrayal on every level by the French regime and people. Thus ridding French society of “undesirable” elements – at the behest of Vichy before the arrival of the Germans in the South – was a national duty. After Liberation, many officials received only mild punishments for collaboration because they had done it “for France,” just as many people created their own versions of events after having become “resisters of the eleventh hour.”¹⁹²

On the Jewish side, the mythology of resistance or of having acted “for France” has left Jews with painful memories. Backed by meticulously accumulated files of the

¹⁹¹ Leventel, 275.

¹⁹² Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 30.

CGQJ and police prefectures of what happened to them and their families, they have viewed the period differently and found the prevalence of this myth painful. The indifference of the French to the fate of the Jews is often expressed by survivors like Gilbert Michlin, one of the few to return from the death camps and to write about his experiences. In his memoir *Of no interest to the nation: A Jewish family in France, 1925-1945*, Michlin tells the story of his parents and their life in interwar France and of their misery in Nazi death camps. The French title, *Aucun intérêt au point de vue national: la grande illusion d'une famille juive* expresses well this “great illusion” of Jews who believed in the French and in their history of liberty and justice.

After returning to France Michlin wanted to see justice, but he was greatly disappointed.

I was fed up with France. Nothing had been resolved. The national reconstruction, the famous national reconciliation meant that everyone in the administration remained in place. When I returned from the camps, I went to the police precinct where my mother and I had been arrested and held before being sent to Drancy. I wanted to see the police officers who had come to our apartment that infamous night to arrest us. Vengeance was not my motivation. I wanted to tell them what my life had been like after they had so conscientiously fulfilled their duty and what had happened to my mother. The authorities were less than accommodating and would not provide the officers’ names. That period was over, forgotten. It was another time, another era. Even today the *préfecture de police* pretends not to understand what it had actively participated in. They do not wish to understand; ...¹⁹³

Levendel, too, feels equally frustrated with the indifference, and in his view injustice, displayed by the French, in his efforts to recover the past and the details of his mother’s “disappearance.” He had been a little boy when the Germans occupied France. On June 4, 1944, to escape German Gestapo and French militia and certain arrest, Isaac and his mother left their modest shop behind to hide on a farm near Venasques, where they joined an older Jewish couple. Against everyone’s advice, however, the mother went

¹⁹³ Michlin, 106-107.

back to fetch a few things from their store and never returned. The last sight Isaac had of her was walking through an old portal among cherry trees and disappearing from his view. This vision was burned in his mind forever.

From that moment on Levendel began his search for the truth of what had happened to her. While he began his search in archives and traveled to the sites of his childhood, including that farm, he found out about Klarsfeld and his *Memorial to the Jews* in which he finally discovered his mother's name. Sara Levendel had been one of the 1,100 deportees in convoy 76 from June 30, 1944. After further meticulous investigations, he finally discovered the truth. Gestapistes had arrested his mother that same afternoon after she had left the farm. He also learned that Aimé Autrand had been responsible for stamping his mothers papers in January 1943 but later had dubiously become a member of the Resistance. An actual arrest by the Germans for his presumed Resistance activities gave him "a clean bill of health" after the war.¹⁹⁴

Like so many civil servants and officials, Autrand had made a relatively easy transition to a life of security under the new republic. His role as zealous bureaucrat in the census of local Jews was forgotten. After all, he had only collected information and stamped identity cards. He had not felt any connection between his work in the Jewish division and the Final Solution. All that mattered was administrative efficiency. Autrand's duties were only a small part within a large bureaucratic machine.

While the impact on the life of Sara Levendel by Autrand's fulfillment of duty was enormous, his actions bore no consequences for him, especially after his arrest as a

¹⁹⁴ Levendel, 306-307.

“resister” by the Germans. The liberation’s subsequent myth about a nation of resisters made sure his alibi would be believable while covering up his past and celebrating his “heroic efforts” in the war. He had become part of a nation of resisters, but also of the nation that became known to have saved three quarters of their Jews. But as Levendel comments bitterly, “If Autrand had been in charge of deporting French *résistants* instead of Jews, he would not have been exonerated for having saved a few of them. He would have been executed as a traitor to the nation. Are Jews cheaper than “pure” Frenchmen?”¹⁹⁵ The answer, it seems, was yes, especially if the Jews were foreigners. While the Vichy government and collaborators in the occupied zone claimed they had attempted to serve and save France – and may have convinced themselves that this was what they were doing – to Levendel they had sold out the ideals of liberty, personal freedom, and equality that were supposedly the core values of the country that they claimed to be protecting.¹⁹⁶

All of these memoirs make clear the role of the French and their complicity in the Nazi program of destruction. The adoption of Nazi-style anti-Jewish policies, liquidation of Jews from high-ranking public service positions, confiscation of their property, denunciations, and round-ups and their collection into concentration camps in France and eventual deportation to Eastern Europe defines the nature of France’s collaboration and contribution to the Holocaust. Although many French collaborators, including the high-ranking officials of the Vichy regime, knew of the fate of Jews who were deported from

¹⁹⁵ Levendel, 274.

¹⁹⁶ Munholland, 813.

France to Eastern European camps, they continued to support anti-Jewish policies and participate in anti-Jewish actions.

What these memoirs have in common is a desire for justice and a recognition from French citizens about their history and their part in the Holocaust. The reaction to the trials of war criminals in France, shortly after the war and even years later, shows that not everyone in France wants to remember, however. Many collaborators paid for their crimes in *l'épuration*, or purge at war's end, but many of the sentences were mild and many collaborators were never punished. At the highest level, a special High Court tried several Vichy leaders, and imposed eight death sentences. Yet, only three ended in executions: Pierre Laval, Joseph Darnand, and Fernand de Brinon.¹⁹⁷ Others were punished by national degradation while those who had fled France were sentenced to death in absentia. Further, in the population at large, about 125,000 men and women were tried, of whom 2,853 were sentenced to death, with 767 executions.¹⁹⁸

De Gaulle, however, altered many sentences for women, including those who had aided the Gestapo and participated in tortures, and for almost all teenagers. In 1947, France began to grant amnesty for national degradations, and in 1954 all in absentia sentences were cancelled. Those who returned were acquitted. Any remaining jail

¹⁹⁷ Since 1940, Fernand de Brinon had been head of Vichy's representative body to the *Militärsbefehlshaber in Frankreich* (MBF, German military occupation authority in France) in Paris, the *Délégation Générale du Gouvernement Français dans les Territoires Occupés* which worked closely with the *Direction des Services de l'Armistice* which in turn was part of the War Ministry; he became Secretary of State with Laval's second term between 1942 and 1943. See Curtis, 253; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 588.

¹⁹⁸ Dank, 323-324.

sentences were shortened or changed to hard labor. By 1964, not one *collabo* remained in prison.¹⁹⁹

Ironically, many “little” collaborators had paid for their crimes during *l’épuration*. Yet, most of the key officials had not. This is not surprising, for the purge was too quick for the outcome to be otherwise. Most Frenchmen, as well as the provisional de Gaulle government, sensed that it was necessary for France to move on. Thus little justice had been served on an individual level, and almost none on a national level. Everyone fell silent over the issue of France’s part in the Holocaust. The latter was temporarily erased from national memory in what Leventel termed “national amnesia.” But this was sometimes punctured by spectacular revelations. In 1971, after meticulous work, Nazi-hunters Serge Klarsfeld and his non-Jewish German wife Beate located in Bolivia the infamous German Gestapo Chef of Lyon Klaus Barbie. They finally brought him back to France in 1983 to go on trial for his role in the deportations of Jews and execution of numerous prisoners. Although he was German, Barbie’s capture prompted the arrest and trial of French war criminals, notably secretary-general of police René Bousquet, his deputy in the occupied zone, Jean Leguay, secretary-general of the prefecture of Gironde, Maurice Papon, and Paul Touvier, a former Vichy militia officer. Leguay died in 1989, just when his case was ready for the courts, and Bousquet was shot by a publicity seeker in 1993. Eventually, Papon was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his part in the arrests

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

and executions of Jews, and complicity in the transfer of Jewish adults and children.

Touvier received life imprisonment for torture and executions of prisoners.²⁰⁰

Many controversies mushroomed during the attempts by the French courts to indict and trial these collaborators, which would take away much of the cathartic effect justice should normally have. Such cases, like the work of Robert Paxton and the films of Marcel Ophuls and Louis Malle, began to shake the “national amnesia.” But as the memoirs indicate, with great difficulty and reluctance.

²⁰⁰ Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Memory, the Holocaust, and French Justice: The Bousquet and Touvier Affairs* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), pp.xxix-xxxii; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 616-618.

5) *collabo, attentiste, résistant* -

Films as an agent in the discovery of the past:

The Sorrow and the Pity; Lacombe Lucien; Au Revoir, Les Enfants

“Duty to Memory”

“Justice on Trial”

At the time of the most famous indictments and trials of the French collaborators, in the 1980s and the 1990s, the French public found itself in a precarious situation regarding “the dark years.” Nazi-hunters and lawyers like the Klarsfelds, historians, filmmakers, and memoir writers had each in their distinct ways bombarded the French nation with the truth about Vichy officials and civilian collaborators during the war. This coincided with François Mitterrand’s presidency from 1981 to 1995. Mitterrand publicly refused to acknowledge Vichy France as being *French* at the time of collaboration, a refusal that helped to keep the truth from emerging from the shadows of the resistance myth. This greatly contributed to the delay of bringing Maurice Papon to justice, taking sixteen years before he was finally placed on trial.²⁰¹ Just as General Charles de Gaulle, Mitterrand had claimed that Vichy had been an aberration in France’s history.

Certainly Mitterrand had his own personal reasons for making such claims about Vichy. Unlike de Gaulle who had been the leader of the Free French forces and participated in the liberation of France, Mitterrand’s past hardly measured up to his leftist credentials. In the 1930s, he had written articles for a pro-fascist paper and right-wing journals and supported rallies against the Republic. He had also worked in Vichy government, first in the “Legion of Fighters and Volunteers for the National Revolution”

²⁰¹ Lauten, 63.

and then in the “Commissariat to Aid Retired POWs”. Then, in 1943, he joined the Resistance. Although he had not been a Nazi sympathizer, he had supported the armistice and joined the Resistance late in the war. In addition, Mitterrand had helped to delay the trial for crimes against humanity of Bousquet. He had characterized his friend as a man of “exceptional stature” during a 1994 television interview about his recently released biography, *Une Jeunesse française*, by Pierre Péan. Instead of clarifying his involvement with the Right in the interwar years and the difficulties surrounding Vichy’s history, Mitterrand intensified the heated arguments over the latter, basically reiterating the shield theory and saying that the anti-Semitic measures of Vichy had only been directed at foreign Jews.²⁰²

But his charging of the difficult situation was only a part of a big cluster of many controversies that arose during the investigations and trials of Bousquet, Papon, and Touvier. For one, there had been considerable distress among lawyers and in the courts regarding legal definitions of war crimes as opposed to crimes against humanity. These disagreements delayed the trials and limited their effectiveness.²⁰³

Secondly, many arguments erupted between resisters and Jews over the definitions of “victim”. Jewish victims were critical of including members of the Resistance to the latter category because their inclusion would dilute the severity of the French contribution to the Holocaust. Conan and Roussio responded to this problem in the book *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past* (1998). They warned that this new obsession to

²⁰² Golsan, *Vichy’s Afterlife*, 103 and 106; Lauten, 63; Curtis, 250-252.

²⁰³ The definition changed four times between 1985 and 1997. See Richard J. Golsan, ed., *The Papon Affair: Memory and Justice on Trial* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 19.

remember the collaboration years mainly in context of the persecution of the Jews could lead to a “Judeocentrist” interpretation of events, leaving out many of the other victims of the regime. There were roughly 30,000 French civilians killed as hostages and prisoners who were suspected and accused of being communists, freemasons, and resisters. And there were another 60,000 individuals who were deported.²⁰⁴ Excluding these victims, as Rousso pointed out, could eventually lead to creating another myth about the occupation years.

At the same time, resisters were cautious to protect their status as moral elite and to renew their image in a more positive light after the Gaullist myth of a nation of resisters had dimmed the glow of the Resistance. In addition, as Jackson suggests, after the resisters had testified during the trials, particularly that of Papon who had allegedly been a member himself, the attitude of the Resistance toward the Jewish people had been interpreted as indifference. This was in addition to the general view that the “real” Resistance members were clutching their “monopoly of honor,” as Robert Gildea termed it. They were seen as being judgmental and somewhat condescending towards the rest of the French who had not been a part of it.²⁰⁵ The insistence by the Resistance to defend their right to their own history was mocked by Jacques Audiard’s film *Un héros très discret* (A Self-made Hero; 1996). “Albert Dehousse” becomes a member of the Resistance after the fact by memorizing details from newspaper articles and books about its real activities during the war.²⁰⁶ After the war, using his new role to get into

²⁰⁴ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 1 and 618-619; Curtis, 270-272.

²⁰⁵ Gildea, 392.

²⁰⁶ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 627.

Resistance meetings, he forces other resisters to “recognize” him, relying on their sentiment of duty – and of guilt - to remember his heroic achievements, which, however, in turn would help to authenticate the reality of their own participation as well as their memories.

These controversies over justice and memory surrounding the trials seemed to spiral out of control and distract from the trials’ actual intent to punish the perpetrators. Yet the investigations and publicity surrounding the trials of Barbie, Touvier, and Papon were somewhat useful because they forced many people to remember France’s part during the war. In particular, they drew attention to the collaborating authorities who had served in the bureaucracy so essential to the success of the Nazi plans, but who had been able to transfer into government and business positions in the Fourth Republic with a clean slate.

Especially Papon was a good example for the civil servants’ ambiguous role during the occupation. He had been one of many opportunist bureaucrats who were able to adjust to the “changing tide of war”, as Curtis put it; Papon could show for a long dedication to France. After all, he had served under the Third Republic, Vichy, the Fourth and Fifth Republics. His case was typical for the Vichy officials who had been unsatisfied with the inapt government of the 1930s. When Vichy was formed, reforms seemed like a good solution and most civil servants supported the regime. As soon as chances became slimmer that Vichy would become a success, many began to sympathize secretly with the Resistance and de Gaulle. During Liberation and later, they continued to serve in government positions for the Republic, as in Papon’s case who served as Prefect

of Police under de Gaulle from 1958 to 1967 and as Budget Minister under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. It was not until 1981 that he had to resign because his wartime activities became public.²⁰⁷

Papon had been a Vichy functionary and then “part-time” resister. He had overseen collaborative actions but he had not intervened on behalf of the victims.²⁰⁸ One historian described Papon’s “ambiguous” role during the war this way: “The talent of the ambidextrous Papon was to continue to stuff Jewish children into cattle trains with his right hand, while offering his left hand in assistance to the good cause.”²⁰⁹ There had been other Vichy officials who had had the same “talent” and Papon’s activities were well documented in German reports.²¹⁰

On the night of July 15, 1942, under Papon’s supervision, French police had arrested several dozens of Jews. Many of these individuals would end up in the same transport to the East as the deportees from the Paris raids of July 16. Part of those arrested on the 15th had also been children under fifteen who had initially been put in the care of other families or children’s homes. Eventually in August, they had been picked up again and placed on the train to Drancy from which they were later deported to Auschwitz.²¹¹ About 1,500 Jews had been deported from the Bordeaux region during Papon’s service in the prefecture.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Golsan, ed., *Papon Affair*, 3-4; Jackson, *Dark Years*, 616.

²⁰⁸ Golsan, ed., *Papon Affair*, 4-5.

²⁰⁹ Michel Slitinsky, *L’Affaire Papon* (Paris: Editions Alain Moreau, 1983), p. iii.

²¹⁰ Meyer, 155-156.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Jackson, *Dark Years*, 623.

Papon's controversial behavior during the war came under scrutiny again when in October 1961, as prefect of Paris police, he watched over the violent suppression by the police of protesters, consisting mostly of Algerian immigrants. The public saw this action as a racist crime. The number of dead and wounded caused by police "intervention" was never assessed. The government ordered an official investigation and the subsequent "Mandelkern Report" stated that there had been thirty to forty casualties. There was much outrage from the public which claimed that there had been two hundred to three hundred victims. What was at the core of the controversy was the refusal by Papon, seemingly backed by government officials, to accept responsibility for the violence and the deaths caused by the police – the same situation as in Vichy almost two decades before.²¹³ Papon's service to France as well as his "role" in the Resistance, however, meant much. It would be difficult for anyone to go against a true patriot.

During the legal actions and trials, most of the accused argued that they had only followed orders and that their actions had been determined by the extraordinary circumstances of the occupation. Many argued that they were only the small officials who were doing their jobs and who were forced to play these insignificant roles within the Vichy apparatus to ensure administrative efficiency. But as Alain Finkielkraut pointed out, this small part was exactly what collaborators had to be held responsible for, because in the Nazi-Vichy death machine bureaucracy there had been so many small men who were each responsible.²¹⁴

²¹³ Golsan, ed., *Papon Affair*, 4-5.

²¹⁴ Alain Finkielkraut, *Remembering in Vain: The Klaus Barbie Trial and Crimes against Humanity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 8.

The Papon trial itself took place from the fall 1997 to spring 1998 in Bordeaux, after having been prepared for over twenty years. The verdict was that Papon had been involved in deportations chosen by German authorities, but that he had been oblivious to the existence of the Final Solution. Still, by taking on the job of secretary-general of police of the Gironde prefecture, he automatically and voluntarily involved himself in and accepted occupation policies and methods. The court in Bordeaux convicted him of crimes against humanity. By then, the trial had lasted six months, the longest in France in the 20th century.²¹⁵ To get to that point had involved “painful legal and verbal acrobatics,” which prompted Richard Golsan to call his account of the trial “[...]Justice on Trial” because justice itself had been manipulated and misused for the twenty-five years preceding the trial to prevent such a reckoning.²¹⁶ Indeed, it was not until July 16, 1995, the 53rd anniversary of the Vél d’Hiv round-ups that President Jacques Chirac officially admitted France’s complicity in the Holocaust.

That France was brought to that point was a result of the painful stories of the war in memoirs like Levendel’s but also because of a series of remarkable films that began to appear in the 1970s. One of the most widely discussed of these was the documentary film by Marcel Ophuls, *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (The Sorrow and the Pity, 1996). Ophuls’s film combined all the various stories of individuals from all walks of life into a powerful documentary about human nature that revealed the complicated experience of the French during occupation - betrayal, hypocrisy, opportunism, emotional pain and fear, and sometimes of compassion.

²¹⁵ Golsan, ed., *Papon Affair*, 1.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 19.

Ophuls's four-and-one-half hour film consisted of interviews with people of diverse social and ethnic background who had lived through France's occupation and the Vichy years. He focused on the town of Clermont-Ferrand, which was conveniently located on the unoccupied zone, only 59 kilometers from Vichy, close to the demarcation line and 380 km from Paris where German occupation headquarters was located. Those interviewed were:

- Sir Anthony Eden. Eden was Winston Churchill's foreign secretary. He had played an important role in British foreign policy in the 1930s and, like Churchill, had been a critic of appeasement.
- Pierre Mèndes-France. A French Jew who later became prime minister and who during the war had served as Air Force lieutenant in the Battle of France. He had been interned with other politicians of the Third Republic and tried for treason. After his escape from prison he was able to join de Gaulle.
- Louis and Alexis Grave. They were two brothers who were farmers from near Clermont-Ferrand. Alexis joined the Resistance and after being betrayed, was arrested and deported to Buchenwald from which he returned.
- Helmuth Tausend. Tausend was a German Wehrmacht officer who participated in the occupation of Alsace-Lorraine and, after being injured on the Eastern Front, was stationed in Clermont-Ferrand.
- Christian de la Mazière. Mazière was a French aristocrat who joined the French Waffen SS and fought in the "Charlemagne Division," a division composed of Frenchmen who fought in German uniform on the Eastern Front.

- Comte René de Chambrun. Chambrun was a lawyer, and also Laval's son-in-law. He later defended Laval at his trial and remained a staunch apologist for Laval and his policies.
- Marcel Verdier. Verdier, a pharmacist, was a Resistance member. The lines for the title of the documentary came directly from his testimony. For when Ophuls asked him what the general feeling was during the struggle, Verdier replied that the two major emotions he had encountered were "sorrow" and "pity".

Ophuls drew from those he interviewed a picture of the occupation period as a time when compromise and ethical corruption were an everyday experience. With his carefully balanced selection of "characters," their diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, Ophuls made it clear that collaboration happened at every level of society. His film confirmed much of the human pettiness and blindness that had existed during a war, as well as human adaptability and dignity. In that sense Ophuls revealed the human face of the occupation years, of difficult decisions, of conduct prompted by fears, shame, calculation, and sometimes desperation.²¹⁷ But above all his film made it clear that the story about French citizens being nearly all in the Resistance had been a big lie.

There is no question that the German occupation, which was accompanied by food shortages, black marketeering, the Gestapo and their omnipresent reputation, and eventually forced labor demands, was a terrifying reality for many. Yet, it was the internal struggles between 1940 and 1944 among the French, which had its roots in the early 1930s, that motivated the population to collaborate and betray their compatriots.

²¹⁷ Carol Plyley James, "Documentary and Allegory: History Moralized in *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*," *French Review* 59 (October 1985): 88.

The French had been dissatisfied with the socio-cultural changes and political inaptitude of the Third Republic. They argued over politics, unemployment, arrival of capitalism, and the decaying state of French tradition, nation state, and empire. While those on the Left saw dangers in Nazism and fascism, those on the Right saw a threat in the Popular Front and communism. The result was that everyone saw “the enemy within.” The appeasement of Hitler with the Munich agreement in 1938, but especially the quick defeat and armistice agreement with the Germans and subsequent occupation, solidified the decade-old divisions among the French and affected people’s state of mind.²¹⁸

It also gave the impetus for many reforms that targeted the “decaying” society, culture, and political structure of France. For Vichy, this meant sanitizing society by restoring a natural hierarchy, moral, and traditional family values, on the one hand, and excluding and deporting undesirable groups which were hotbeds for unemployment, socialism, and alienating cosmopolitanism, on the other. Many professions were purged and reserved for French natives. Youth groups were organized, designed to raise a new generation of dedicated Frenchmen. While there were true believers, the National Revolution itself did not have much success. The circumstances of German occupation based on those interviewed made clear, that much pressure was placed on French resources. Ironically, the early military successes, like the later failures of the Wehrmacht, caused most Frenchmen to focus on themselves and their own survival. The plans for reform boiled down to passivity, economic jealousy, police brutality, and pettiness. Frenchmen denounced each other, foreigners, and Jews to the French police

²¹⁸ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 6.

who were glad to conform to long-needed German-style discipline and order. As Alexis Grave explained, it was not the Germans who discovered his connection to the Resistance, but a Frenchman, someone locally who had betrayed him to the authorities. Ophuls showed that this was a more accurate version of the history of the French under Vichy than the official version that the myths so conveniently perpetuated.

This theme of Frenchmen against Frenchmen is well illustrated by the fighting between the Resistance and the Milice. The Milice was a ruthless group, consisting of anti-Communists, extremely conservative Catholics, some legionnaires, and many young men without any concrete political convictions who wanted to escape the STO.²¹⁹ Some joined simply for the promise of Jewish booty. In general, the Milicien aped the ceremonies and symbolism of the SS and were eager to prove that they were an important authority within the Vichy regime.²²⁰ By the end of 1943, as the Resistance grew bolder with the advancement of the Allies, members of the Milice began to increase violent attacks on the members of the Resistance. To some extent, there was an ideological adherence on both sides. Some fanatics, like head of Milice and Vichy secretary of the interior Darnand who had pledged an oath of loyalty to Hitler, believed in German victory until the end.²²¹

For the most part, however, the struggle between the two groups resulted in a constant exchange of reprisals. One of the most famous incidents had been the murder of an elderly couple reportedly by the Resistance. Although they had actually been killed by

²¹⁹ Marrus and Paxton, 321.

²²⁰ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 230-231.

²²¹ Dank, 251.

the Milice, the latter was able to make the Resistance appear guilty. Outraged, Laval signed a law allowing special court-martials under Darnand's authority that translated into death sentences for Resistance members. Following short trials, prisoners were quickly executed.²²²

But soon, the organization lost appeal because of its brutal tactics, on the one hand, which became ever more brutal once German defeat became more and more real in 1944. On the other hand, the air filled with the promise of an Allied victory, traditional anti-German sentiment re-asserted itself among the French, while the Resistance grew stronger and found more active supporters. The threats the Resistance made through radio broadcasts from London as well as in written notes were now also more convincing.²²³

But *The Sorrow and the Pity* makes clear that most people were not actively "resistant." While Alexis Grave's participation shows the most active side of the Resistance, many Frenchmen believed in passive resistance, or "civil disobedience" according to historian John F. Sweets.²²⁴ As one of the men in a small rustic pub indicates in the documentary, everyone went to salute the flag of the French state, but he did not go – for him "this was not France." In some instances, doctors made efforts to resist by forging health certificates for young men who would otherwise have been drafted for the STO.²²⁵ For many, this kind of passive resistance to the regime and to the Germans was enough. The degree of collaboration, like the motives behind it, varied, but

²²² Dank, 256.

²²³ Dank, 249-251.

²²⁴ John F. Sweets, "Hold that Pendulum! Redefining Fascism, Collaborationism and Resistance in France," *French Historical Studies* 15 (Autumn 1988): 753.

²²⁵ Ibid.

in viewing *The Sorrow and the Pity*, it becomes obvious that collaboration had been much more widespread than resistance.

Some historians have argued that Ophuls's work is itself a myth, suggesting that the documentary is really a film about the French as a "nation of collaborators."²²⁶ This would overstate Ophuls's intent which was to bring the French to reexamine the prevailing myth and the realities – and complexities – of French behavior in this painful period that most tried to forget or deny. Certainly, however, Henry Rousso's point in *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France*, is well taken when he reminds everyone that Vichy had not been the one and only evil and that the German occupation forces should not be ignored.²²⁷

In truth, Ophuls's work represents that balance accurately. His documentary was not what Rousso warned against, of keeping score of who died gun-in-hand, who resisted, who denounced, or who collaborated.²²⁸ That was not the case, as French filmmaker Louis Malle, who himself dealt with this period in two important films, remarked about *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Ophuls, he said, had to break down barricades of silence about this ugly side of the French past and therefore needed to make what seemed to some an ideological film that would expose French collaboration in a realistic way; and a film, from which both Ophuls and the viewer could make a moral judgment.²²⁹ While not really making a documentary about the French complicity in the Holocaust per se, Ophuls busted the "Gaullist myth of Resistance" and made it impossible to perpetuate

²²⁶ Soucy, 744; Munholland, 807.

²²⁷ Henry Rousso, *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. xix-xx.

²²⁸ Rousso, *Haunting Past*, xix.

²²⁹ French, 103-104.

uncritically the story of the heroism of the Resistance and France's overwhelming participation in it.²³⁰ Collaboration, as was revealed in the words of those interviewed, existed in many fine shades. This involved from looking the other way, making money on the side on the black market and denouncing an annoying competitor. Ophuls's film drew a new picture of the occupation, which was realistic enough to open the eyes of the public in 1969, and succeeded in triggering an avalanche of academic research and legal investigations that encouraged Holocaust survivors to come forward. And, as in Papon's case, this brought collaborators, who had for a long time been hiding behind lies and many hiding in plain sight, to pay for their actions.

If Ophuls's powerful documentary forced the French to reexamine a painful period in their recent history, Louis Malle did so as well with his film *Lacombe, Lucien* in 1974. But he did so in a different way, because Malle's film represented the occupation years from an even more discomfoting angle. In fact, after Ophuls, Malle's film probably came closest to describing the situation the average Frenchman found himself in during the war. For most people there were few choices, political or economic. They did what they had to do to survive. These were what Paul Jankowski has called "marginals without conviction,"²³¹ ordinary individuals without a concrete ideology or clear-cut motives. Malle decided to focus on such an individual, of why some chose one course, others making different decisions.

²³⁰ Michel Foucault quoted in Alison, Smith, *French cinema in the 1970s: The echoes of May* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 198.

²³¹ Paul Jankowski, "In Defense of Fiction: Resistance, Collaboration, and *Lacombe, Lucien*," *Journal of Modern History* 63(September 1991): 482.

“Lucien” is a primitive young man from the countryside who wants to join the Resistance through the help of his schoolteacher. Yet he is turned down because he is too immature. He does not have to pout for long because the *gestapistes* are hiring. They are occupying a hotel in town where they interrogate and torture suspected Resistance fighters. They order Lucien to guard a hostage who has already gone through some rough interrogations. When the latter tries to talk Lucien into freeing him, the boy puts tape over his mouth to silence him. He does not seem to feel the need to get involved at all, for France nor for a fellow Frenchman; he is simply flattered by being asked to join the group and the attention he receives.

Later, Lucien is equally ignorant as to why he is brought to the home of a man who lives with his mother and daughter. He just tags along with one of his superiors, playing with his gun. The family represents three generations of Jewish integration: the mother is a foreign immigrant Jewess who does not speak French; the father, a tailor who is well-educated and assimilated, and his daughter who is entirely French and largely ignorant of her Jewish heritage. The fact that they are Jews escapes Lucien completely, and it becomes clear that he does not really know what that means. Lucien is only interested in the girl. After contributing to the arrest of the father, he gets to know and like the women. He drops in on visits and later helps them to escape to an abandoned country house. Eventually, he is captured by Resistance fighters at Liberation and is executed.

Lucien is completely ignorant of the socio-cultural and political upheavals of the war that surround him. His only instinct is at first to be part of the group and do what his

new acquaintances ask and then to get - the Jewish family - to safety and to survive. It is clear to Malle that the vast majority of the French people were guided by the same instincts, whether they helped to save Jews or not. The film describes, in a subtle way the disconnected relation between the individual and French society in general and emphasizes how Lucien experienced the occupation as an anti-hero.²³² He had worked for the collaborators and saved Jews, in both instances almost by accident and because of self-interest. The individuals' daily lives and the war happened simultaneously, albeit separate, and therefore an escape from events was not really possible.²³³

Malle represented the random nature of any given individuals' involvement in either collaboration or support for the resistance. The film shows that one got involved and did not have a choice for the most part. The side one was on was in some ways only a matter of luck or unfortunate circumstances. Malle was in this context "sympathetic" to the French because collaboration or resistance was not something that people got actively involved in, but rather, were drawn into. As historian Richard Cobb concluded from his studies about Franco-German relations in German-occupied areas of France during both world wars, each individual's actions were determined by the situation, "Collaboration and resistance are both eminently personal stances that have no past..."²³⁴ What mattered was the moment; the decision each person made according to the circumstances and pressing needs was immediate and not motivated by ideology. This explanation makes

²³² Smith, 172-73.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Richard Cobb, *French and Germans, Germans and French: A Personal Interpretation of France under the Two Occupations, 1914-1918/1940-1944* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 73.

sense when discussing French complicity in the Holocaust, since difficult times tend to trigger an increase in xenophobia and racial prejudice.

But Cobb's idea and Malle's suggestion of accidental participation and emotional response is also helpful in explaining the countless efforts by the French to save Jews and others in need. Since there was no attachment to any kind of ideology, people decided that they had to help fellow human beings, whether they were Resistance members or Jewish children. Frenchmen ignored their fears of being arrested because they acted impulsively and according to their basic human nature. Malle's representation of the war years generally made sense, and in fact he based his film on real events and persons. Though he had the idea for his film beforehand, in his research and interviews with former collaborators as well as historians, Malle learned of a real person named "Hercule" whose story was similar. Hercule was physically disabled with one shoulder higher than the other; hence Malle's Lucien was something of an outsider in his community. Hercule worked for the Gestapo and infiltrated the Resistance for them. With his help, a large number of people were denounced and eventually the Gestapo and the *gestapistes* raided the local Resistance group and deported over 100 people from Figeac. Hercule was executed right after the war. In Malle's view, what counted most to Hercule/Lucien, was personal gratification. His character did not understand the cultural context, nor did it matter to him, for as Malle put it in an interview about the film, he had "no sense of ideology".²³⁵

²³⁵ French, 93 and 96-97.

This behavior or attitude was exactly what helped to save Jews. During 1942 people became more and more frustrated with the regime as well as with the constant German demand for ever scarcer resources. The public increasingly detested Laval, in particular, because he had made promises to bring back French POWs in a one to three exchange ratio for labor under the STO. Most importantly, the public was outraged at the treatment of the Jews by the French police. While in the occupied North, raids and arrests were conducted by German and French police, in the South the internments, round-ups and deportations were carried out solely by French gendarmes. The Vichy regime had claimed that as long as the French were “cooperating” with the enemy, France would never be want for anything and avoid being occupied directly by Nazi fanatics. This hope ended in November 1942 when the Germans occupied the remainder of France, now called the “southern zone,” following the Allied victory in North Africa on November 8.

Malle makes the same point about collaboration in his film *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*, which chronicles his own experiences during the occupation. The main character “Quentin” is based on Malle as a child who was sent by his upper-class parents to a boarding school in the French countryside. The school is run by Carmelites and they are hiding several Jewish boys whom they have given false names. Among them is “Jean”, and he and Quentin become close friends. Throughout the film “clues” reveal to Quentin that there is something different about Jean, but at his age he does not really understand what “Jews” are. At the end, having been revealed, the Gestapo and the Milice come to arrest the boys as well as the head of the school.

The film made clear to viewers that it was the Milice who came with the Germans in tow and that they were more aggressive and more persistent than the Germans. The same point is made when the Quentin is dining with his mother at a restaurant in which an elderly Jewish man, who was a frequent customer, is out dining and is set upon by a group of Milicien who attempt to eject him. In this instance, they are put in their place by a waiter and a group of German officers. Malle's point of French complicity is obvious.

The viewer learns that it was a kitchen aid, a local French boy with the limp, who betrayed the Jewish children as revenge for the school boys' making fun of him and exposing his black-market trading. Again Malle's film suggests that French collaboration was all along personal, instantaneous, and without much understanding of the cultural or ideological context. It suggests the "silence" and passivity of the French, but also the moments of sacrifice and risk displayed by some, as in the film.

Although Vichy was the one semi-independent country in Nazi-Europe that offered the most help to the Germans regarding deportations, after the war most French governments along with Vichy apologists frequently reminded everyone that it was the French state, after Denmark, which had saved most of its Jews. Only seven percent of the Jewish population in France died compared to the sixteen in Italy, only 24 percent were deported, as opposed to the 78 percent from Holland, 45 percent from Belgium, and 50 percent from Hungary.²³⁶

The number of "Jews saved" from France is a troubling issue, however. For one, Nazi control and interest in other countries varied by geography, which meant that France

²³⁶ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 234-235.

was strategically more important than Denmark. Secondly, France's role in German history as perennial enemy determined some of the decisions made by the Nazis, especially regarding revenge for Versailles and reparation payments. As Eberhard Jäckel pointed out, France, before the war, was the country with the most decision-making power regarding Germany's fate and the Versailles Treaty.²³⁷ The Germans were now making the same demands on the French to fulfill similarly harsh provisions in the treaty. While this put considerable pressure on France, the country also needed some autonomy to regulate its economy and make it work. The German occupants were therefore careful enough to mitigate French anti-German sentiments by allowing the Vichy leadership to believe in the illusion of French sovereignty, while at the same time squeezing the country for supplies and labor. Throughout the war, France remained the largest supplier of materials, food, and labor from all Western European countries.²³⁸ All of these factors created for France during the war and in Nazi plans almost a unique situation that must be kept in mind in assessing the actions of French leaders and the French people, whether collaborators or not. This means that Vichy, well aware of traditional anti-German sentiment, did have to make more difficult choices than, for example, Norway or Italy whose ideological adaptability accommodated German war aims in Europe.

However, this also means that the "number saved" in France was still too low. In the view of many, a country that had such a hostile attitude to Germany throughout history, a country that was strategically so crucial, not just for the Germans but also for the Allies' access to Western Europe, and a country that had the labor force and the food

²³⁷ Jäckel, 14.

²³⁸ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 362.

supply the Germans needed, should have been able to resist more. France should have refused to arrest more Jews and should have refused to establish detailed lists of deportees. Yet, most accounts suggest that France did the opposite. The combined efforts of historians, memoir writers, “memory militants” like the Klarsfelds, and filmmakers Ophuls and Malle have attempted to reexamine and confront the past and French memory of this past.

Chirac’s declaration of Vichy complicity was an important step for the French overall and the victims in particular towards putting the past behind them.

Conclusion

Vichy considered itself a legitimate government and the regime that represented France. At the same time, Vichy officials knew they would be persecuted and that they would not be treated as legitimate representatives of the nation. At the end of the war, therefore, they had to flee. If in their own minds they had truly believed they had been forced into collaboration by the Germans and by their cooperation served as a shield, they could have faced Charles de Gaulle and the Allies. Vichy officials and supporters, like some apologists later, believed they had acted on behalf of France. They also understood that the people would not understand or appreciate their service, which prompted their escape, – which in reality was an escape from responsibility.

The historian Henry Rousso in his work on French history and memory, *The Vichy Syndrome*, has elucidated the popular, long-held argument that Vichy was an “aberration,” that it was a “non-state” and that its National Revolution grew out of a vacuum created suddenly by the defeat of 1940.²³⁹ This view, like the myth that the great majority of the French in spirit at least belonged to the Resistance, was carefully sustained from de Gaulle to Mitterrand. Yet, every action Vichy undertook was in fact in response to Third Republic crises and ineptitudes, making the French state without a doubt a reactionary regime, quite apart from the Republic that it replaced and wanted to “reform.” Vichy was not an ad hoc regime thrown together to patch up temporarily a politically chaotic situation, but the result of a long process of a search for order in society, the economy, and especially politics that had begun in the late 19th century.

²³⁹ Rousso, *Vichy Syndrome*, 6.

Vichy would deliver, at least for some time, order, authority, and guidance. Its leaders thought that Vichy could become a representation of France's necessary and much desired return to its "old" self of peasants of the soil in a happy hierarchy with an authoritarian leadership – a paternalistic system, incarnated in Marshal Pétain. Jackson has observed in his study of these years how widespread and deeply held sentiments were and how similar Vichy's program for the National Revolution was to the rhetoric during the First World War, particularly the celebration of the [soldier-] peasant and nurturing mother, the cult of the military leader, and the praise of national unity.²⁴⁰

The only disconnect was between the admiration for Pétain and the reality of Vichy's policies. The Marshal had many supporters while his regime did not. This idea was emphasized in the 1950s by Robert Aron who suggested that Laval had been at fault, not Pétain.²⁴¹ This, however, is basically another version of the argument that there had only been a handful of collaborators and that Pétain had really erected a shield by establishing Vichy. But then traitors within the regime, especially Laval, had betrayed him.²⁴² Certainly, allegiances of the regime's members varied greatly and were very complex, as was also the case in the Resistance. There were pro-Pétainist and anti-Semitic resistance fighters, as well as pro-British, anti-German and pro-Jewish Pétainists.²⁴³

Unfortunately, the key decision makers, especially those that had initiated and overseen the deportations, were all seasoned anti-Semites. Among these, were Laval and

²⁴⁰ Jackson, *Dark Years*, 26.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

²⁴² Ibid., 6 and 9.

²⁴³ Ibid., 4.

Pétain. The latter had not been just an innocent old man who was used by the people in his regime. He had hand-selected most of his followers from previous governments. He had learned through several sources, such as military generals, his personal doctor, Pastor Boegner and various representatives of relief organizations about the conditions of the camps in France and the actual intent of the deportations.²⁴⁴ Although he might have been shocked since he had friends among upper-class French Jews, he did not intervene on the victims' behalf.

After the war the Gaullist myth of Resistance covered up the truth about Vichy and many collaborators escaped punishment. Most, in fact, would continue their lives undeterred and often in the same positions, as Leventhal and Michlin have shown. In order to ensure national reconciliation, subsequent governments, with the support of much of the general public accepted the notion that Vichy was an aberration and the work of a few. This made it difficult for the victims of collaboration and survivors of the Holocaust to find justice, especially since until the end of the war it had been difficult to comprehend what was happening.

The historians Paxton and Meyer, as well as Klarsfeld, have shown that the first clear reports about the Eastern European camps in regard to the Final Solution already were disseminated in mid-1942.²⁴⁵ Some accounts came from people associated with relief organizations. One was the American Donald Lowrie who was part of the World Alliance of the YMCA and who worked with Vichy's Ministry of the Interior.²⁴⁶ In his

²⁴⁴ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 143-144; Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France*, 262.

²⁴⁵ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 146; Meyer, 435; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 144.

²⁴⁶ Paxton, *Vichy France*, 146; Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 144-145.

letters, he emphasized that the claim of labor purposes was unlikely because of reported cases of children, the sick as well as old persons being among the deportees.²⁴⁷ The BBC and British newspapers had been informed in May 1942 by the Polish *Bund*, a Jewish workers' organization, about the mass murder by the *Einsatzgruppen* as well as the killings in gas trucks in the Chelmno concentration camp. American and Swiss dailies were reporting the raids in Paris of July 16 and 17 and the tragedy of the deportations of Jews from both zones.²⁴⁸ A note from August 1942 declared that the Central Consistory knew about the fate of the deportees, referring to a speech by Hitler from February 24, 1942, in which he assured the extinction of the Jews, and also relying on the information disseminated by the BBC. The Consistory made clear that it knew about the massacres in Eastern Europe as well as the extermination program in Germany and German-occupied countries.²⁴⁹ Eventually, the declaration from December 17 1942 by the Allies and the *Comité National Français*, based in London, made the public aware of the existence of "gas chambers" and that the German authorities were achieving Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.²⁵⁰

But many Jews themselves could simply not believe the truth about Auschwitz. According to Hannah Arendt, she and her husband could not accept it in 1943, especially since it went "against all military necessities and requirements."²⁵¹ Jeremy Joseph described the story of a deportee in Auschwitz who shouted through a fence at newcomers that they should do something and that they and their families would be

²⁴⁷ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 144.

²⁴⁸ Meyer, 284-285.

²⁴⁹ Klarsfeld, ed., *Zusammenarbeit*, 157; Meyer, 285.

²⁵⁰ Meyer, 287.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

burned. People believed she had become insane because of the harsh working conditions and treatment in the “factory”. It was too unbelievable to them.²⁵²

The Holocaust was so unthinkable, because it was inhumane as well as unprecedented, an event in the words of Ahlrich Meyer “which remains impossible to be grasped in its monstrosity.”²⁵³ Many collaborators as well as victims thought that it was not real, being only a myth. This made it easier for both, during and after the war. As Meyer explained, many could use the fact that the event was so unbelievable because they were able to keep up the fictitious claim that they had not known anything and that their actions had therefore nothing to do with it.²⁵⁴

For the collaborators in particular, this made their everyday duties even more mundane – the assembling of lists, filling out and stamping papers, arresting criminals and undesirables, and conducting trains. They were all just part of a highly structured bureaucracy and necessary even during times of war. To create order, new decrees were issued, new laws implemented. Those were supposedly “harmlessly local” in their application, but, every part of this network connected Vichy to the German war machine and the Final Solution. As Jeremy Josephs puts it:

The deception which had begun in Paris some three years earlier with the publication of the First Ordinance was now complete. Now the truth was there, for everyone to see. The heavy doors [of the ‘shower’ rooms] were shut firmly. [...] And then crystals of Zyklon-B were introduced.²⁵⁵

Vichy, then, had not just been a passive bureaucracy. Against the background of their ideas of nationhood and “land-rootedness,” the regime’s authorities actively

²⁵² Jeremy Josephs, *Swastika over Paris* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1989), pp. 164-165.

²⁵³ Meyer, 356.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 17.

²⁵⁵ Josephs, 148-149.

supported the Nazis in their anti-Jewish program through legislation and logistics. As Michael Curtis explained, “Vichy was both responsible for the civic death of Jews – by legal exclusion from the French community, by removal from economic life, by spoliation and Aryanization – and their physical death by internment and deportation.”²⁵⁶ Vichy’s decree laws first excluded Jews from the French society in which they had been for so long an integral part, stripped them of their property and financial securities, collected them in camps in both zones, and then provided for their deportation.

If the Germans really had occupied the South from the beginning or Vichy’s refusal to cooperate, results could have been significantly different. As Marrus pointed out, the Nazis did not feel the same contempt for the French people as for the Eastern European ethnicities whom they considered uncultured, savage, and less than human. It was therefore not until 1944, when they felt that defeat was near and retreat necessary, that the Nazis became increasingly aggressive toward the French.²⁵⁷

Until that point in time, the occupiers were aware that France was not this “subhuman environment,” and although France was the arch enemy, the French were higher on the Aryan scale in Hitler’s ideology. The Germans were cautious in approaching Vichy in regards to racial policy, especially since the Jews in France were more integrated and respected by their compatriots.²⁵⁸ They had to make Vichy leaders come to them and by then, Vichy was well prepared.

²⁵⁶ Curtis, 354.

²⁵⁷ Gildea, 314-315. This would result in the massacres of Oradour-sur-Glane on June 10, as well as Touraine, Tulle, and Saint-Amand. Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Marrus, *Holocaust in History*, 65 and 69.

If the Germans would have “pressured” the French into cooperation, the latter would have revolted as a result, and the occupation authorities would have had to apply the same brutal repression against the French as well as the Jews. Yet, as Klarsfeld indicated, the Germans did not have the manpower available in France to do this. Instead, the Vichy regime implemented its measures voluntarily and participated in the deportation of Jews.²⁵⁹

Vichy was sometimes acting under pressure from the German authorities, but more often of its own free will. The regime and its supporters made a choice to collaborate and participate in the extermination of Jews, justifying their belief that they were representing all of France. In many ways they were. Anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in French society, reaching back decades, and now found its culmination during Vichy. It accused the Jews of being part of a radical politics responsible for France’s degenerative state. Jews were at the heart of the problem. The regime followed its own ideas of race and cultural purity and promoted nostalgia for the fatherland in which it glorified the peasantry, rural France and the good old days of order, just as the Nazis had found support for their anti-Jewish policies elsewhere in Western and Eastern Europe. Jews were not part of this glorified version of French history and never would be, especially since they were “foreign.”

Vichy, then, was not an “aberration”, but a regime of ordinary men who harbored much political and social discontent and who, as they saw it, wanted to improve their situation and renew their country. To do that, they were willing to accommodate the

²⁵⁹ Gildea, 397-398.

Germans in various ways. Supplying them with food, war material, and labor was an important first step. However, to retrieve the sovereignty necessary to reconstruct their own country, Vichy had to go much further and use something for negotiations that the Germans desired most: the acceptance of racial anti-Semitism, the removal of Jews from society, and their extermination. This was the substance of Nazi ideology and Hitler's goals.²⁶⁰ Vichy could easily provide the first two because everything was in place for it already before 1940 and it was perfected during the war. In these instances Vichy's interests overlapped with those of the Germans. Vichy's efforts on behalf of the Germans and the willingness to deport Jewish immigrants, their French-born children and other citizens by the thousands uncover the racial aspect of the motivations of the French state.

²⁶⁰ Klarsfeld, *Die Zusammenarbeit*, 322.

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